

Fisheries Management Scotland

Meeting of Directors – Minutes

9 September 2020

By Videoconference

Present

Richard Sankey (Chairman)
Chris Conroy
Alexander Scott
Alasdair Laing

Lorraine Hawkins
Mary Nicholson
Bill Whyte

Apologies

Alison Baker
Peter Landale
Douglas Dobie

In attendance

Alan Wells
Brian Davidson
Polly Burns

1. Welcome & introduction

Polly Burns, the Aquaculture Interactions Manager was welcomed to the meeting and introduced to the directors.

2. COVID-19 impacts

2.1. Financial support for Fisheries Management Scotland members

Extensive engagement continues with Marine Scotland to make the case for financial support. The Marine Scotland Marine Analytical Unit are developing a survey which will help assess the impact of COVID-19 on the salmon and freshwater fisheries sector. In the absence of the national electro fishing programme, Fisheries Management Scotland continue to work with Marine Scotland to identify funding opportunities for an adult sampling project.

2.2. Maintaining key fisheries management activities under lockdown

The COVID-19 situation is reviewed regularly and our guidance has been updated in light of the changing situation. Following discussions with Scottish Government, advice which allows a reduced physical distance measure of 1 metre under certain circumstances may now apply to boats used in angling, subject to appropriate mitigation measures and risk assessment undertaken by fishery owners and operators. Scottish Government have also endorsed the Fisheries Management Scotland guidance on meetings. Support and advice continues to be provided to members on this topic.

3. Communications

3.1. *Annual Conference*

Given the current uncertainty in relation to COVID-19 restrictions and the lead-in time to deliver a physical event, it was agreed to provide a costed proposal for virtual delivery of the 2021 event for the Board to consider. **ACTION: BD/AW**

3.2. *Annual Review*

The Board considered some outline design options and agreed with the proposal to bring the design in-house. Given the work involved, it was agreed to retain the outsourced editorial input and that this would be factored into the overall costs. **ACTION:AW/BD**

3.3. *Website*

Time has been invested by staff in reviewing the design and content of the website. The site is looking dated and there is now an accumulation of content which could be presented in a clearer and more user-friendly way. It was agreed to provide the Board with a costed proposal to deliver a re-designed website. **ACTION: BD**

4. Staffing

4.1. *Staff appraisals*

MN provided a summary of the staff appraisal process for the past year. All staff were congratulated on their performance against a backdrop of a very challenging year.

5. Financial & administrative

5.1. *Draft annual accounts*

There were no substantive comments on the draft accounts for the 2019-20 financial year. Expenditure for the year fell within budget and figures within the income statement, balance sheet and notes were clarified. It was agreed to ensure that the accounts clearly explain that the income and expenditure also includes the Scottish Fisheries Co-ordination Centre and emphasises the ring-fenced nature of SFCC reserves. **ACTION: BD**

5.2. *Cashflow and balance sheet*

The cashflow and financial reporting processes for the Directors has been reviewed since the change to our new accountants. A draft report was circulated for comment and there were no substantive comments on the format and content of the report. It was agreed that the format would be used for future reporting to the directors. AL and BD would liaise on some minor changes to the current layout and incorporate these in future monthly reports. **ACTION:BD/AL**

5.3. *Draft 2021-22 budget*

The draft budget was circulated, and the Board discussed various options to manage costs for next year. There was an emphasis on managing the subscription costs to the membership for 2021, in recognition of the challenging financial circumstances which are likely to persist into 2021. A final budget, and subscription figures, will be circulated to the Board by correspondence, for approval at the AGM in November. **ACTION:AW/BD**

5.4. *Staff working arrangements*

The Board recognised that homeworking under the COVID-19 circumstances has worked very well with no disruption to activities or productivity. However, given the very

favourable office lease arrangement, and the value in staff having the facility to meet, it was agreed to retain the office with a view to reviewing the situation before the end of the current financial year.

5.5. 2020 AGM

It was agreed that, given the continuation of COVID-19 restrictions, the AGM on 4 November should be held as a virtual meeting. Advice has been sought from our legal adviser to ensure that this is undertaken in a manner consistent with the articles.

ACTION: BD

6. Strategic and financial review

6.1. Update from meeting on 1 September

A summary of the discussion from the review group meeting on 1st September was circulated. The Board discussed the Missing Salmon Alliance (MSA) and the development of a closer working arrangement with the MSA. It was agreed to explore options in more detail leading up to the forthcoming AGM in November with a view to further discussion at the AGM.

6.2. Supporting Fisheries Management Scotland members

The Board considered outline ideas for supporting Fisheries Management Scotland members. This included assisting DSFBs to discharge their statutory functions, particularly in relation to managing applications for developments in their districts and ensuring trusts have greater financial opportunities from monitoring, fish rescues and mitigation works as a result of development. The Board were positive about the ideas contained in the paper and felt that this would provide welcome support for members. These ideas will be developed further in collaboration with members. **ACTION: AW**

7. Policy updates

7.1. Aquaculture

PB provided an update on her key activities as Aquaculture Interactions Manager. This included:

Working to support the Kyle of Sutherland DSFB on a range of issues relating to freshwater production of smolts. This included meetings with Highland Council and Marine Scotland raising concerns about the current situation and identifying future actions, including the production of an Environmental Monitoring Plans on Loch Shin.

Fisheries Management Scotland and members have devoted significant effort in response to the escape of almost 50,000 farmed salmon at Mowi's Carradale North site. These fish have been reported in a number of rivers draining into the Firth of Clyde. PB has coordinated engagement with our members and the wider angling community to ensure everything is done to monitor and mitigate the situation where possible. This has included the provision of guidance, and the development of a system to collate information. Work is now underway with Marine Scotland Science and Mowi to design a genetic monitoring project which will allow us to assess and understand the impact of this escape. This will also form the basis for future monitoring and mitigation programmes which can be built into a reformed regulatory regime for fish farming in Scotland.

PB continues to engage with Fisheries Management Scotland members, regulators and key stakeholders with a focus on improving the situation for wild salmonid fish. PB attended a meeting of SEPA's finfish advisory panel and met with the technical working group to discuss the developing spatial planning framework for aquaculture developments.

AW highlighted recent press coverage regarding the West Coast Tracking Project – a partnership between Fisheries Management Scotland, Atlantic Salmon Trust and Marine Scotland Science. It was agreed that this would be discussed at the AGM in November. Fisheries Management Scotland has been working with the SSPO over several years to develop a suitably governed support fund for wild fish. As reported in January the Board had significant concerns about a previous draft proposal. AW reported that discussions to address our concerns had not yet been progressed.

7.2. Fish health issues

BD provided an update on current fish health issues (red skin disease). Regular engagement with the Fish Health Inspectorate (FHI) continues. They have received and processed several fish for sampling and are undertaking a comprehensive case review of the samples from 2019. Whilst no causative factor has been identified, from this review they have made clear distinctions between what is confirmed as red skin disease and what might previously have been reported as this condition.

Investigations by FHI, in close collaboration with colleagues across northern Europe, have revealed novel pathology in some cases, but the cause and significance of this remains unclear. They have not isolated a virus or bacterial species that would give major cause for concern.

Fisheries Management Scotland are working with FHI to produce a 'Frequently Asked Questions' sheet on red skin disease. The Board noted that the reported condition was highly variable between rivers, with some rivers showing little to no affected fish with others showing high incidences. CC noted some marks on fish captured on the Ness underwater cameras, and it was agreed to share details with FHI. **ACTION: BD/CC**

7.3. Enforcement

BD reported that the Enforcement Committee recently agreed to progress a review of the bailiff training course. This will be conducted jointly with members of FMS and IFM. Online training resources to deliver examinations, informal assessments and courses have been scoped and this will allow the development of a suite of training resources, not only for enforcement but all aspects of fisheries management training. BD will report progress to the Board. **ACTION: BD**

7.4. SEPA

AW provided a summary of activities relating to SEPA. This includes:

- Prioritisation of smolt passage issues at large impoundments (hydro and reservoirs). An update will be provided at the forthcoming Fish and Fisheries Advisory Group. This process includes the specific issue of smolts being trapped in the Caledonian canal which is being progressed in collaboration with the Ness DSFB.
- Engagement with SEPA regarding water scarcity across Scotland. Concerns remain in the north and north east of Scotland. Whilst SEPA's approach of engagement with

abstraction license holders appeared to be working successfully, we expect a consultation on a new regulatory approach to be published soon.

- SEPA's approach to regulation as the lockdown eases has led to considerable frustration amongst DSFBs and Trusts. This has been raised with SEPA and it is understood that this position will be reviewed shortly. SEPA shared their decision-making framework which has now been circulated to members.
- We are working with members to identify areas where SEPA might take a different approach in the context of the forthcoming wild salmon strategy, and to help understand priorities in advance of the next round of river basin management planning.

7.5. *Environmental Information Regulations – implications for DSFBs*

AW reported that the Scottish Information Commissioner (SIC) has now determined that DSFBs are 'public authorities' for the purposes of the EISR and are required to meet any requests for information in line with the regulations. All DSFBs have received guidance prepared by Fish Legal which sets out how this should be done. The Board recognised that this was the expected response from the SIC and noted that this was likely to have significant implications for DSFBs.

8. Wild camping and impact on fisheries

The Chairman raised a number of issues associated with extensive participation in wild camping following the easing of COVID-19 restrictions. This has been a common issue across Scotland with negative implications for fisheries, including increases in illegal fishing, breaches of access legislation, byelaws, littering and other negative behaviours. It was recognised that such issues are often hard to address, but it was noted that they have been raised within the Scottish Parliament, through MSPs and at agency level at SNH. The situation would continue to be monitored.

9. AOB

9.1. *Proposed Changes to Pre-Application Consultation Requirements in Planning*

LH noted the consultation above and asked whether Fisheries Management Scotland will be responding. AW confirmed that Fisheries Management Scotland would be engaging with members to develop our consultation response. AW agreed to discuss this further with LH. **ACTION: AW**

10. 2021 meetings

Thursday 28 January (tbc)
Thursday 25 March
Thursday 1 July
Thursday 9 September
Thursday 11 November (AGM)