

Fisheries Management Scotland

Meeting of Directors – Minutes

21 January 2021

By Videoconference

Present

Richard Sankey (Chairman)
Alison Baker
Roger Brook
Chris Conroy
Douglas Dobie
Lorraine Hawkins

Alasdair Laing
Peter Landale
Mary Nicholson
Alexander Scott
David Summers
Hugh Younger

Apologies

Bill Whyte

In attendance

Alan Wells
Brian Davidson
Polly Burns
Sean Dugan

1. Welcome & introduction

The Chairman welcomed all to the meeting and introduced Hugh Younger. Hugh has been appointed to the Board, representing the Tweed Foundation and will replace Douglas Dobie who has stepped down as a Director. Douglas has served on the Board since the inception of Fisheries Management Scotland and the Chairman expressed the appreciation on behalf of the Board to Douglas for the time and expertise he has contributed to the organisation.

2. COVID-19 impacts & 2021 season

The Board recognised that ongoing restrictions on movement and interaction of people will continue to affect the sector during 2021. Alan Wells reported that following dialogue with Marine Scotland, it was confirmed that local fishing can continue to take place. However, travel restrictions are already impacting on the opening weeks of the 2021 season and are likely to continue to do so during the spring. This coupled with the fact that much of the cancelled fishing in 2020 was carried over to 2021 means that financial impacts will continue during 2021. Discussions with Marine Scotland about financial support have been re-established.

In addition to trying to establish a bespoke support package for the sector, discussion around delivery of specific projects has started. This includes potential support for work on the National Electrofishing Programme for Scotland, a national genetic introgression programme, work to provide additional information to inform national conservation regulations and the west coast tracking project. Progress on the discussions around financial support will be fed back to the Board. **ACTION: AW**

3. Missing Salmon Alliance (MSA)

Fisheries Management Scotland joined the Missing Salmon Alliance in January and Alan is engaging with the partners across a number of workstreams. Positive discussions are underway to explore how the Missing Salmon Alliance can support existing and new activities of Fisheries Management Scotland and the Board will be updated on these discussions in due course. Brian has joined the communications group, and it is expected that an advocacy group will also be established. Peter Landale advised that engagement between all partners has been very positive, and that the Missing Salmon Alliance is a fantastic opportunity for collaboration to deliver co-ordinated salmon conservation actions. The Missing Salmon Alliance promotional brochure is at a final draft stage and Peter welcomed comments.

4. Communications

4.1. *Virtual annual conference*

Brian Davidson outlined the key ideas in a paper that was circulated for discussion. It is proposed to structure the event around three sessions - the overall strategy for salmon and some of the national issues, including how the salmon pressures tool will help deliver solutions, to profile members activity on addressing some of the bigger challenges that salmon face and profile the Missing Salmon Alliance and how collaborative working will improve the way we address the salmon crisis. This will offer an opportunity to display the new relationship with other salmon partners and demonstrate how Fisheries Management Scotland and our members are participating in this process.

The Board favoured the overall approach. Key messages that should be delivered at the event are achievements of Fisheries Management Scotland, how COVID is impacting on the sector and discussions with Scottish Government to address these. A virtual event will also facilitate overseas participation and input, and it was agreed to explore this opportunity further. Ensuring that there were suitable opportunities to encourage discussion was considered to be an important consideration, recognising that this is more challenging in a virtual event.

4.2. *Annual Review*

Brian Davidson reported that the review is at an advanced stage of planning. As agreed at the last meeting, the design is being undertaken in-house to reduce costs. The review will present the work of Fisheries Management Scotland and members, an overview of the Missing Salmon Alliance, a guest article and the range of river reports and catch data from 2020.

4.3. *Website*

Brian Davidson reported that the current website re-design process is going well. The existing web provider has presented an outline design and management system which is consistent with the design brief. It was agreed to share some of the page designs with the Board before the launch. **ACTION: BD**

5. Staff update

5.1. *Wild Salmon Strategy*

Alan Wells reported that Alastair Mitchell, deputy director at Marine Scotland for aquaculture and salmon and recreational fisheries, has had to take medical retirement. We have worked with Alastair for many years and our thoughts are with him and his family. In addition, the salmon and recreational fisheries team currently has limited

capacity due to staff illness. As a consequence, the wild salmon strategy process has stalled. It is hoped that this is a short-term issue. Ideas have been submitted on key desired outcomes from a Fisheries Management Scotland perspective and what work the network is doing to respond to salmon challenges. Alison Baker expressed disappointment about the lack of progress, particularly given the level of input Fisheries Management Scotland has invested in the process so far. It was agreed that the Board would be kept apprised on progress and submissions to the process by Fisheries Management Scotland. **ACTION: AW to keep the board apprised in relation to the strategy.**

5.2. *Salmon pressures tool*

Alan Wells confirmed that the development and launch of the salmon pressures tool will be an important part of the strategy process. Marine Scotland have stated their intention to take forward a process of 'harmonisation' to ensure that there is good agreement between local outputs and national perspectives. Alan has been asked to chair this process and it will commence soon. It is anticipated that this will result in an agreed prioritisation of pressures (and potentially actions, such as riparian planting) which will form the basis of Scottish Ministers' future prioritisation of actions.

5.3. *Aquaculture*

Polly Burns provided an update on a range of aquaculture issues. This included actions in response to the most recent escape of farmed fish from a Scottish Salmon Company site off Skye on 31 December – final confirmation of the scale of this escape is awaited. Due to the timing of the escape and small size of fish involved, it was considered that the recapture of these fish would not be feasible. Fisheries Management Scotland is working closely with the Skye and Lochalsh Rivers Trust, Marine Scotland Science and Scottish Salmon Company on a range of follow-up actions.

Work on the Carradale fish farm escape continues. Scale samples were collected to confirm that visual identification of farmed salmon by anglers was indeed correct. Scales have been read by Ayrshire Rivers Trust and verified by Marine Scotland Science and a full report will be completed soon. This was the first time in which an assessment of that scale has been undertaken in Scotland. Genetic samples have also been collected from rivers draining into the Clyde estuary, and these are being examined by Marine Scotland Science. Further genetic samples will be taken later in 2021 to assess whether genetic introgression has occurred.

Work also continues on improving the delivery of local fish farm Environmental Monitoring Plan (EMP) processes – this involves discussions with a range of key stakeholders with the aim of ensuring that EMPs are properly and consistently designed and adhered to.

Roger Brook asked about the lack of a response from the Scottish Government on the recommendations of the Salmon Interactions Working Group. This is a matter of great frustration and Alan Wells and Polly Burns continue to press the case for increased momentum from the Scottish Government. Whilst it was accepted that Brexit and COVID-19 were factors in this delay, it was emphasised that it was not acceptable for the delay to persist.

5.4. Enforcement

Brian Davidson provided an update on a range of enforcement actions. A framework for delivering online training has now been agreed between Fisheries Management Scotland and the Institute of Fisheries Management. The core bailiff training course is currently being reviewed and will be moved online once complete. The first online examination was held in early December and a further one will be held at the end of February 2021. The move to online examinations has provided much greater flexibility for candidates and meeting the needs of the DSFBs and others who require training.

As part of the national risk assessment process for fish poaching, the increase in poaching incidents reported by members as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic was highlighted. The upturn in unlawful activity during 2020 was subsequently confirmed in the Scottish Police Authority performance report which confirmed a 282% rise in fisheries offences between April-September 2020 with COVID being a contributory factor. These figures highlight the importance of DSFBs maintaining capacity to deliver on their statutory duties, and the need to protect our fisheries during lockdown. This will be discussed further at the next meeting of the Partnership Against Wildlife Crime (PAW) poaching sub-group.

Input was provided to the National Wildlife Crime Unit two-yearly strategic assessment, including actions pink salmon awareness and enforcement, media articles on salmon, the last enforcement seminar and the training delivered by Fisheries Management Scotland and members to Police and the Crown Office Procurator Fiscal Service. Other work includes development of an enforcement episode as part of the wider International Year of the Salmon Film Project.

Alison Baker noted that there has been a better response from Police Scotland in response to fish poaching incidents in the Forth district and better engagement both locally and nationally is making a difference. To get a better picture of illegal activity, it was agreed to ask Police Scotland whether data on number of incidents (rather than just charges) can be collected. **ACTION: BD to take up via PAW.**

5.5. Scottish Fisheries Coordination Centre (SFCC)

Sean Dugan provided an update on key SFCC activities. Planning for the annual SFCC Biologists' meeting in February was a key task. The event will profile the work of members and also involve external contributors to discuss a diverse range of topics, including national input to pressures on salmon, Norwegian approaches to assessing threats on salmon, and a range of contributions on water quality, including forestry, agriculture and invertebrates, scale reading, aquaculture and eel conservation.

SFCC has also been providing support on mapping services to members, principally on technical issues. Work is now complete on the transfer of the SFCC online database to a new provider.

5.6. SEPA

Alan Wells provided an update on the current situation with SEPA. As a result of the cyber-attack over the festive period, many of their regulatory and administrative systems are not in operation and as a result there has been no response from SEPA on a number

of policy areas. Alison Baker reported that due to this lack of response, the Forth DSFB/Trust are now receiving enquiries about a range of matters, including those around controlled activities regulations. It was also recognised that there is a heightened risk that certain land and water activities may occur in an unregulated way, with detriment to the water environment. **ACTION: Alan will raise these issues with SEPA and Marine Scotland in the coming weeks.**

5.7. Catchment management

Alan Wells reported on the Peatland summit which was chaired by Roseanna Cunningham MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform. This was a positive, high profile meeting which provided an opportunity to highlight the contribution that Fisheries Management Scotland and our members can contribute to this important policy area.

Through the Missing Salmon Alliance, Fisheries Management Scotland are involved in a project, initiated by the Fishmongers Company, to bring together partners to deliver a strategic UK-wide native tree planting project. This is consistent with the wild salmon strategy and likely to be high on the national climate change agenda. Mary Nicholson referred to a recent paper produced by Royal Botanic gardens, Kew on planting trees – there is a lot of support for native planting initiatives. Mary advised that certain planting practices on peat can compromise carbon retention though either planting too shallow or too deep. It was recognised that it is important to get members to identify where any future funding might be most effectively targeted in relation to tree planting.

6. AOB

Douglas Dobie highlighted how much he has enjoyed working with the Board and contributing to the work of Fisheries Management Scotland.

Chris Conroy asked whether there is likely to be a further look at good governance from a national perspective. Brian Davidson confirmed that a further review of both the DSFB and trust codes of practice is to be undertaken. The possibility of using the e-learning platform to develop some online resources to assist with governance is also being actively considered.

7. 2021 meetings

Thursday 25 March

Thursday 1 July

Thursday 9 September

Thursday 11 November (AGM)