

NESS DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD

2013 Annual Report

Including Accounts to Year Ending 15 May 2013





FISHING BREAK

At Ness Castle Lodges on the banks of the River Ness, you can enjoy superb private salmon fishing whilst reveiling in luxuriously appointed 5-star accommodation. It's the perfect escape for family and holiday groups seeking first-class facilities surrounded by the glories of the Scottish landscape. The Lodges offer a mile of double bank salmon and wild brown trout fishing on some of the river's best fly water. With an experienced 3 times world spey casting champion ghillie to hand for advice and casting tuition, anglers can fish from the bank, wade or drift in the boat, and enjoy superb sport amid idyllic surroundings.

For more details, contact: +44 (0)7778 503350 dfs@homefarms.co.uk



www.nesscastlelodges.co.uk



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Acronyms and Abbreviations

CEH	Centre for Ecology and Hydrology
FCS	Forestry Commission Scotland
IFM	Institute of Fisheries Management
MFTI	Moray Firth Trout Initiative
MS	Marine Scotland
MSE	Marine Scotland Enforcement
MSS	Marine Scotland Science
MSW	Multi Sea Winter
NBFT	Ness and Beauly Fisheries Trust
NDSFB	Ness District Salmon Fishery Board
RLI	Rivers and Lochs Institute
SAC	Special Area of Conservation
SEPA	Scottish Environment Protect Agency
SFCC	Scottish Fisheries Coordination Centre
SNH	Scottish Natural Heritage
SSE	Scottish and Southern Energy
SSSI	Site of Special Scientific Interest
SW	Scottish Water
UHI	University of the Highlands and Islands



Foreword

CHAIRMAN



It is my pleasure to present the Board's 2013 Annual Report, including Accounts for the year ending 15 May 2013. As some of you may know all Boards have signed up to a code of good governance drawn up by the Association of District Salmon Fishery Boards and our report this year has been expanded to provide not only the information required by the code but also to give readers a broader perspective of our work.

The end of this year brought about the end of a triennial period and hence the election of a new Board. My thanks must firstly go to all past Board members and co-opted members and in particular to Andrew Duncan for his leadership as Chairman and for his support to me in my past role as CEO/Clerk. In now taking on the Chairmanship I know that we can go forward with a strong and cohesive Board that will not only benefit from the continuing support of past members but also from new members who I believe a will make a real contribution to our work.

I also look forward to working with our new CEO and Rivers Director, Chris Conroy. Chris brings a wealth of knowledge, experience and energy to the role and I am sure that with his efforts and the continuing support of the Board and the wider angling community we will be able to make real progress in dealing with the many challenges that we, and our salmon and sea trout, face in this demanding modern world.

Michael Martin

Chairman

DIRECTOR



During my first few months as Director of the Ness District Salmon Fishery Board I have taken the opportunity to take a close look at how as an organisation we are performing against our statutory duties.

It was immediately apparent that much has been achieved, particularly with regards to the management of the board including compliance with statues and codes of governance, effective administration and sound financial control. We have a strong and highly experienced water bailiff resource which has pursued a number of successful prosecutions over the past year.

Further to this and particularly over the last year, the Board and its partners have laid the foundations for the delivery of a number of pioneering projects aiming to reverse the decline of the salmon catches in Ness system, many of which are described in further detail in this report. I look forward to taking these and new initiatives forward together with our partner organisations over the coming years.

Chris Conroy Director



About Us

The Ness District Salmon Fishery Board (NDSFB) is a statutory body responsible for the protection and enhancement of salmon and sea trout fisheries in the Ness District. It was constituted under the 1862 and 1868 Salmon Fisheries Legislation, subsequently amended in the Salmon Act 1986 and the Salmon Conservation (Scotland) Act 2001 and more recently amalgamated under the Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries (Consolidation) (Scotland) Act 2003.

Salmon fishing rights in Scotland are private heritable titles that are registered separately from land. As such these titles can be bought and sold like any other property. In Scotland, the cost of the local administration, protection and improvement of the fisheries is privately financed by the proprietors.



Playing a salmon at Ness Castle on the River Ness

The District Boards finance their work by levying a rate on the salmon fishery owners in the district. The 2003 Act states that a district board shall have the power to impose an assessment, to be known as the fishery assessment, on each salmon fishery in their district. The fishery assessment is assessed at such uniform rate as is determined for all fisheries in the district by the board and shall be exigible according to the valuation of a fishery as entered onto the valuation roll.

Elected representatives of those salmon fishery owners provide the core of the membership of the Board. However, since 1986, the boards are required also to include representatives of salmon anglers and salmon nets-men in the district. A further revision to the constitution of the Boards was made in 1999 to allow for even wider representation on the boards by other parties who may have an interest or stake in salmon stocks or fisheries.

A District Salmon Fishery Board may do such acts, execute such works and incur such expenses as may appear expedient for:

- The protection or improvement of the fisheries within their district;
- The increase of salmon (and sea trout); or
- The stocking of the waters of the district with salmon (and sea trout).



Our Team

BOARD MEMBERS

Board members are elected triennially with the Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries (Consolidation) (Scotland) Act 2003 specifying who may stand for election, how many may be elected and how many may represent the lower and upper rivers. The latest elections took place in September 2013. Board members are all volunteers and are non-remunerated for their time and effort. The elected Board members subsequently elect one of the members to be their Chairman. The current Board members are as follows:

Michael Martin, Dochfour (Chairman)			
William Armstrong, River Oich			
Andrew R. Duncan, Ness Castle			
Paul Williamson, River Garry			
Annie Givan, River Moriston			
Ryan Rutherford, Ness-side			
Ken Gowans, Highland Council			
Alexander Patience, Netsmen Graham Mackenzie, Anglers Angus MacGruer, Anglers Alan Scott, Anglers Neil Cameron, Ness and Beauly Fisheries Trust			

The Director/Clerk attends Board meetings without voting powers. Other non-voting attendees represent Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), Scottish and Southern Energy (SSE), The Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS) and the Ness and Beauly Fisheries Trust (NBFT) Senior Biologist.

BOARD STAFF

The Board employee a number of full and part time staff responsible for the day to day management and delivery of its core duties and responsibilities:

Director/Clerk to the Board	Chris Conroy
Head Water Bailiff	John MacColl
Secretary to the Board	April Conroy
Part Time Water Bailiffs	Gordon Mackenzie Ryan Rutherford Gordon Armstrong Keith Williams Nick Barker



The Ness System

The Ness system's catchment area covers some 2000 square kilometres of land and drains East & North through the Great Glen into the sea at Inverness.

Land use within the catchment is dominated by sporting estates, rough grazing and both native and commercial forestry. The key urban areas, including the City of Inverness, are mainly distributed in coastal areas. Other smaller settlements of note include Fort Augustus, Invergarry and Drumnadrochit.

The ness system has been the subject of extensive

The River Garry on the upper Ness system



hydroelectric schemes since the late 1800's. Of particular importance in terms of their impacts on salmon and sea trout populations are the Glen Garry and Glen Moriston schemes. Hydro-electric development either directly or indirectly affects a considerable proportion of the ness system.

Rainfall from the mountainous terrain runs into the many burns, lochs and rivers. Heavy rain can peat stain the tributaries but generally the lochs on the system filter out all the sediment allowing salmon fishing to be enjoyed in all but flood conditions.

The famous Loch Ness is by far the largest loch in the system. At its top end it is fed by the Tarff, Garry/Oich and Moriston systems. The Moriston is designated as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) due to its importance for Atlantic salmon and Freshwater pearl mussels (*Margaritifera margaritifera*). All are significant spring/early summer salmon fisheries with water levels controlled for electricity generation.



The River Ness at Ness Castle

The Rivers Coiltie and Enrick flow into Loch Ness at Urquhart Bay, Drumnadrochit. The floodplain between these two rivers supports one of only a few alluvial woodlands remaining in the UK; a habitat which is considered to be rare throughout Europe. It has been designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and an SAC. These tributaries are known to be important spawning and nursery areas for summer/autumn salmon and grilse.

The six mile long River Ness flows north from Loch Ness and Loch Dochfour into the Moray Firth. Its tree lined reaches flow through rolling Inverness-shire

countryside before passing through the heart of the City of Inverness. Unlike other Scottish rivers there are no temperature barriers to slow the fish down as the water temperature in the short River Ness is kept artificially high due to the size of Loch Ness above it.





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What We Do

FISHERIES SCIENCE

The NDSFB works in close partnership with the NBFT and other key bodies such as SSE to gain a detailed and up to date understanding of the status of salmon and sea trout populations within the District. Keys sources of information include:

- Electric fishing survey data;
- SSE fish counter data;
- River habitat survey data;
- Fish barrier assessments;
- Water quality assessments;
- Fish health investigations;
- Population genetic structuring; and
- Analysis of annual catch returns from rod and net fisheries.

The receipt of such information allows the Board to make an informed assessment of the potential impacts of development proposals within the District, assess applications for scientific and other exemptions to the 2003 Act and to inform its own fisheries management activities such as stocking, habitat improvement and conservation measures.

A healthy two year old salmon parr captured during a routine electric fishing survey





FISHERIES MANAGEMENT

The production of juvenile salmon and sea trout in a river system is limited by the availability of good quality spawning and nursery habitat. The principle aim of our fisheries management activities is to maximise the natural production of salmon and sea trout in the Ness system through the protection and enhancement of spawning success and juvenile survival. This is achieved by:

- Improving access to spawning and nursery areas through the removal of man-made obstacles and the clearance of natural/semi-natural blockages;
- Identifying and mitigating problems relating to water quality (including diffuse and point sources of pollution) and quantity;
- Enhancement of in-stream and riparian habitat;
- Control of invasive non-native species;
- Monitoring, control and management of predators where there is evidence of 'serious damage' to the fishery; and
- Managing the exploitation of returning adults through agreement with coastal netting operations, the promotion of catch and release amongst rod and line anglers and the prevention of illegal exploitation of fish.

The NDSFB works with a wide range of partners to achieve these aims and objectives. This includes the NBFT, regulatory bodies such as the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) and SNH, together with individual land owners and tenant farmers.

A large natural debris blockage on the River Coiltie





FISHERIES ENFORCEMENT

The NDSFB employs a team of highly experienced and Institute of Fisheries Management (IFM) Certified Water Bailiffs. They are led by our Head Bailiff John McColl and are responsible for the enforcement of the Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries (Consolidation) (Scotland) Act 2003.

A Water Bailiff is defined as any person appointed as such under the 2003 Act by a District Salmon Fishery Board or by Scottish Ministers. A Water Bailiff has various statutory powers of arrest, search, entry and seizure which extend to the whole district of the Board together with that of any adjoining Board. The production of a Water Bailiff's photographic warrant of appointment allows them to exercise their powers. Any person who refuses to allow a water bailiff to exercise his or her powers shall be guilty of an offence, and liable to summary conviction.

Our Water Bailiffs complete regular patrols of the catchment throughout the year. These are carried out day and night and cover the main river, tributaries, lochs and coastline. They have a range of specialist equipment at their disposal, including: unmarked vehicles, patrol boats, video cameras, image intensifiers and thermal imagers. Water Bailiffs work closely with Wildlife Liaison Officers from Police Scotland, together with officers from other enforcement agencies.



Ness District Water Bailiffs embark on a routine coastal helicopter patrol

It is a criminal offence to fish for salmon without the legal right or without written permission from the owner of the right. Although in general it is not a criminal offence to fish for or take trout and other freshwater fish in Scotland, this does not mean that there is a free right to fish anywhere. The rights of riparian owners (who own the fishing rights for trout and other freshwater fish) are protected by principles of civil law. No one (even if lawfully on the bank of a river or loch under a right of access) has an implied right to fish there. Fishing is only available to the owner of a fishery or with their written permission.



Key 2013 Operational Statistics

FISHERIES	Juvenile Salmonid	•	A total of 36 fully quantitative and 31 timed electric fishing surveys
SCIENCE	Surveys		were completed across the Ness District by the NBFT in 2013. These
SCIENCE			primarily focused on the Garry system, where 28 timed and 26 fully
			quantitative surveys were completed
	Population Genetic	•	A draft report has been produced by the NBFT, in partnership with the
	Structuring		Rivers and Fisheries Trusts of Scotland (RAFTS) and Marine Scotland
			(MS), presenting the results of a study into the genetic structure of
			salmon populations across the Ness and Beauly catchments
	River Habitat Surveys	•	The NBFT has now completed a detailed River Habitat survey across
			the Ness, Enrick and Coiltie, Moriston, Garry and Oich, Tarff, Foyers
			and Farigaig
FISHERIES	Improving Access	•	4 burns cleared of impassable blockages during the spring period, 15
MANAGEMENT			burns cleared to date this Autumn prior to the spawning season
_		•	A further 9 burns 'tidied up' a part of a three year rolling programme
	Identifying and	•	Suspected unlicensed river works detected on the Tarff during the
	mitigating problems		summer (investigation on-going)
		•	Holm Burn ran dry on a number of occasions in 2013, with the
			potential for the loss of up to three year classes of juvenile salmon and
			damage to valuable spawning habitat (meeting arranged with SEPA to
			uiscuss issues) Marine Harvest reported an assence of approximately 200 colmon parts
		•	from their Laddie Wood site (Lech Carry) on the 15 th July 2012
	Monitoring control		Continued participation on the Moray Firth Scal and Saw Bill
	and management of	–	Management groups
	Predators		Scaring techniques employed together with successful applications for
			management licences
		•	Approximately 15 mink rafts were deployed across the catchment by
			the NDSFB. together with a further 9 by the NBFT
	Managing the	•	The NDSFB, working in partnership with the Beauly District Salmon
	exploitation of		Fishery Board, agreed one-off compensation payments with the
	returning adults		proprietors of two netting stations to cease netting during the 2013
			season until at least May 2014
		•	Our Conservation Policy continues to be a success with an overall 2012
			release rate of 75% and a 'spring' release rate of 97%.
	Consultations	•	To date in 2013 the board has commented on approximately 15
			development proposals ranging from small scale hydro schemes to
		 	large scale windfarms and off shore developments
FISHERIES	Coastal Patrols	•	7 boat patrols completed in Moray Firth Area in partnership with the
ENFORCEMENT		1	Conon Fishery Board
	Diver Detuel	•	A further patrol completed by Marine Scotland Enforcement (MSE)
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Latest Catch Statistics

CATCH RETURNS

Information relating to adult run size is an essential management tool for any District Salmon Fishery Board. Catch returns are the main indicator of adult run size available for the Ness system. Catch statistics are collected annually by Marine Scotland Science (MSS) for all fishery districts in Scotland. In addition to this District Salmon Fishery Boards are able to collect data directly from proprietors twice per year.

As a considerable historical data set exists (1952 to 2012), the size of the run can be used as a measure of its status by comparing the annual run against a long-term average run size. Please note that the data used throughout this section are Crown copyright, used with the permission of MSS, who is not responsible for interpretation of these data by third parties.

Releasing a September grilse at Dochfour on the River Ness





SALMON ROD CATCHES

The 2012 total Ness District salmon catch of 847 fish was the lowest for the last thirteen years, with an overall trend for decreasing catches over the last 61 years. The five year average total catch between 2008 and 2012 (991 fish) was the second lowest since 1952.



Total Ness District rod salmon catches (salmon and grilse combined) over the last 61 years (1952 to 2012)

'Spring' catches on the Ness system have been in decline since 1967, with an all-time low recorded in 2007 (110 fish). There has been a slight increase in 'spring' catches since 2009, suggesting that although 'spring' component is still in decline, the rate of decline has reduced (i.e. showing signs of improvement).



Ness District 'spring' salmon catches (January to June) over the last 61 years (1952 to 2012)



Overall, multi sea winter (MSW) salmon catches have declined throughout the 61 year study period. This decline has continued since 2009 (where as 'spring' catches have shown signs of improvement). This suggests that numbers of summer and autumn salmon in particular may be in decline.



Ness District multi sea winter salmon catches over the last 61 years (1952 to 2012)

An overall trend for increasing numbers of grilse is apparent throughout the 61 year study period. Despite numbers falling significantly over the last two year (2011 and 2012), this trend continues, with grilse now making up over 40% of the total annual catch.



Ness District grilse catches over the last 61 years (1952 to 2012)



SALMON NET CATCHES

Many of the original salmon netting stations in the Ness District were bought out by the Atlantic Salmon Trust in the 1980's as a conservation measure. These and a number of others are no longer operational, resulting in a significant reduction in the annual numbers of net caught salmon. In 2012 the numbers of salmon netted were less than 8% of the 1952 catch.



Total Ness District net salmon catches (salmon and grilse combined) over the last 61 years (1952 to 2012)

The fixed engine (bag net) fishery ended in 1986. Those remaining are net and cobble fisheries, which use a sweep net, paid out from a boat and worked from the shore or from waters adjacent to the shore. Salmon are then surrounded by the net and drawn to shore.

The key remaining sweep netting stations in the Ness district are located at Rosemarkie, Longman and Alturlie Point. The Rosemarkie station ceased operating between 2007 and 2011 following a conservation agreement with the NDSFB. Fishing commenced once again in 2012.

A further conservation agreement was reached in 2013, with the proprietors of Rosemarkie and Longman agreeing to cease netting until at least May 2014.

Tradition net and cobble and team at the Kincurdie Fishery, Rosemarkie





SEA TROUT ROD CATCHES

The Moray Firth once supported a prolific rod and line fishery for sea trout, with the total annual reported Ness District catch peaking at 3,540 fish in 1960. Since that time catches have steadily decreased, with a total annual reported catch in 2012 of just 77 fish.



Total Ness District sea trout catches (adult and finnock combined) over the last 61 years (1952 to 2012)

The NDSFB are helping to address declining sea trout catches through our involvement with the Moray Firth Trout Initiative (MFTI). This is a collaborative project formed by local Fishery Trusts from around the Moray Firth to conserve local wild trout populations. The MFTI is working with local Fisheries Trusts, District Salmon Fishery Boards and Community Angling Associations to protect salmon and sea trout through environmental education and the conservation of trout populations and their habitat. Their key aims are:

- The conservation of Moray Firth trout populations;
- Improved education and awareness of trout ecology, freshwater environments and associated threats in the local community;
- A network of community volunteers and river ambassadors;
- A sustainable and locally managed Moray Firth rod and line fishery for trout; and
- The improved understanding and management of Moray Firth trout populations.



Conservation Measures

CONSERVATION POLICY

Given the overall trend for decreasing catches on the Ness system, it is essential that the exploitation of all salmon (especially spring salmon) must be reduced as much as possible. Consequently the Board strengthened its Conservation Code in 2011 and this was continued with the following recommendations for season 2013:

- From the start of the Season to 30 June all salmon should be released;
- Anglers should not fish with worms during this period in any part of the system;
- From 1 July to the end of the season all hen fish of any size and all cock fish over 10lbs should be released;
- All coloured and gravid fish must be released;
- Anglers should not fish with worms in September or October in any part of the system; and
- No more than one clean fish weighing less than 10 pounds may be retained per angler per day.

Remember that The Conservation of Salmon (Prohibition of Sale) (Scotland) Regulations 2002 make it illegal to sell rod caught salmon or sea trout in Scotland.

A fresh run 12lb 'spring' salmon released back to the River Ness in May 2013





Worm Fishing

The Conservation Policy recommends that anglers should not fish with worms before 30 June or after 31 August anywhere in the District. This is due to the fact that many fish caught by using this bait are often deeply hooked and because of this the Board considers this method of fishing incompatible with the need for conservation.

Remember that the River Ness Salmon Fishery District (Baits and Lures) Regulations 2007 prohibits the use of prawns and shrimp (or any part of them) as bait when fishing by rod and line for salmon and sea trout throughout the River Ness Salmon Fishery District. It also prohibits the use of worms as bait when fishing for salmon and sea trout in the part of the District above Dochfour Weir.

Hooks

At the beat's discretion spinning is allowed as an option throughout the whole system. The Conservation Policy recommends that any spinning lure or plug must have only one hook no bigger than size 4. Similarly, fly hooks should be no bigger than size 4. Preferably all hooks should be barbless or crimped. It is further recommended that, whenever possible, fly fishing should always be given a fair try in preference to spinning.



Fish Counter Data

Automatic counters were first developed in the late 1940s to allow fishery managers to assess whether or not fish passes incorporated into hydroelectric dams were facilitating the upstream passage of salmon. Two such counters where installed in the Ness catchment by the then North of Scotland Hydro-electric Board (now SSE), the first at Invergarry Dam on the River Garry (1956) and the second at Dundreggan Dam on the River Moriston (1969).

These resistivity counters have been regularly updated by SSE since their first introduction and operate on the principle that the body of a fish has lower electrical resistance than the surrounding water. Three electrodes are mounted across the flow of a counting channel. The distance between the electrodes determines the length of fish detected and the magnitude of the change in resistance provides an indication of the size of the fish responsible. The direction in which the fish is travelling can be determined by the shape of the signal.

The total annual count and five year averages for the Dundreggan Counter are presented below. It can be seen that there has been a general trend for increasing catches in recent years, with the 2013 count (454 fish) the highest for 31 years (last exceed in 1980 when 572 fish were recorded).



Total upstream adult salmon counts at Dundreggan Dam, River Moriston (1969 to 2013)



The picture at the Invergarry Counter is very different, with the number counted having declined over the last fifty years and showing little sign of recovery. Historical annual counts of 600 to 800 salmon have now reduced to a five year average of 40 salmon, although the 2013 total count (56 fish) was above the five year average (46 fish).



Total upstream adult salmon counts at Invergarry Dam, River Garry (1956 to 2013)



Strategic Plan 2012 to 2014

The Board's catchment area is one of the most varied in Scotland both in terms of its waters and the genetic diversity of its salmon population. Throughout the system catches have been in decline, with the upper part of the system suffering particularly badly.

While there has been a general improvement in the number of salmon returning to Scottish rivers, the overall catches on the Ness system are showing little sign of recovery. This raises the question of whether something fundamental is happening within the system itself. Undoubtedly there is a combination of factors at play.

Some, for instance smolt survival at sea, are well known. Others may be more difficult to establish with certainty. Identification of the problems that the system is facing, together with the identification and implementation of remedial actions - presents the biggest challenge that the Ness Board has ever faced. That challenge will be manifest in terms of the board's technical resources, it's very limited financial capabilities and in harnessing the will of a diverse range of system users (both fishermen and non-fishermen) to face up to those challenges and accept the potentially difficult decisions that may need to be made.

In 1964 the system produced 3300 fish to rod and line. Fifty years on the system will produce less than 1,000 fish despite reductions in netting effort and the promotion and practice of catch and release by anglers. This demonstrates the potential of the system but also its decline. In order to try to address this fundamental downturn in the productivity of the system a well thought out set of Strategic Objectives, supported by detailed implementation proposals, was drawn up by the board. These are presented below:

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

- 1. Ensure that all possible available habitat is opened up to salmon access and is fully utilized;
- 2. Develop a cohesive plan to tackle the problems of the upper part of the system;
- 3. Work with the salmon farming industry to ensure that salmon farming activities presents NO risk to the wild salmon population;
- 4. Work with SSE to mitigate the effects of their present and future developments on the salmon population and to ensure that they fully comply with their obligations in respect of their existing facilities;
- 5. Implement a catch and release policy which spreads the conservation effort evenly across the system and is straightforward to police;
- 6. Ensure a complete and accurate return of all fish caught is made to the Board;
- 7. Ensure the system remains as free as possible from non-native species;
- 8. Work with and through the NBFT and all other interested bodies to promote and publicise the environmental, leisure, tourism and heritage benefits that a vibrant and sustainable salmon fishing resource will bring to the Ness District and its inhabitants; and
- 9. Develop such systems, management structures and methodologies as are required to implement these strategic objectives.

This section of the report describes the progress to date against each of the Strategic Objectives, together with any problems faced in achieving them. It is our intension to review these objectives over the coming year.



ENSURE THAT ALL POSSIBLE AVAILABLE HABITAT IS OPENED UP TO SALMON ACCESS AND IS FULLY UTILISED

The principle aim of our fisheries management activities is maximisation of natural production of salmon and sea trout. This is limited by the availability of and access to good quality spawning and nursery habitat. The ability of the river to achieve maximum production is in turn dependent on the number of eggs laid and distribution in relation to such habitat. The following examples highlight the key problems faced on the Ness system and the work that is being carried out by the NDSFB and its partner organisations to resolve them.

Inverfarigaig Bridge Apron, River Farigaig

The Farigaig is one of the largest river systems that enter the south side of Loch Ness. Additionally it is perhaps the only remaining river that enters on the south shore that supports a population of salmon.

A bridge apron at the Invefarigaig road crossing has been identified as a partial barrier to fish migration. The limited electro-fishing data held by NBFT indicates that year classes of juvenile salmon appear to be missing.

Habitat downstream of the bridge apron is dominated by large substrate sizes and there is a paucity of material of a suitable size for salmon and trout spawning. Better quality habitat is available upstream of the bridge, particularly in the vicinity of the junction of the Farigaig with the Liath Burn. Indeed, the Liath Burn offers material suitable for spawning throughout much of its length.

A scheme was prepared outlining the work needed to remove this barrier and SEPA were approached

Bridge apron at the Inverfarigaig road crossing



with a view to securing funds to cover the cost of the work involved. Unfortunately, funds have not yet been secured and this barrier remains in place. A further threat to this river is Scottish Water's plan to abstract water to supplement Loch Ashie. We are continuing to work with SEPA, Scottish Water and the bridge owner – The Highland Council – to secure the funds necessary to address our concerns.

Low Flows on the Holm Burn

The potential for an 'out of water' incident on the Holm Burn has been a concern for some time. As such the NDSFB and NBFT have been actively pressing SEPA and Scottish Water (SW) to ensure that management processes are in place to ensure that such an incident does not occur. Key to this is the provision of an adequate compensation from its source at Loch Ashie.

Unfortunately the worst case scenario was realised in 2013, with the Holm Burn running dry on a number of occasions. This has the potential to result in the loss of up to three year classes of juvenile salmon and damage to valuable spawning habitat. These events have been







recorded and a meeting arranged to discuss potential solutions with SEPA. If a compensation flow can be established then the Holm Burn has the potential to be an important spawning and nursery area for the lower system.

Removal of Blockages

The removal of "natural" barriers (generally woody debris) is the subject of review and ongoing maintenance work undertaken by our team of bailiffs.

Woody debris can have positive benefits to a river system. It acts to create cover for fish and the scouring action of water running around the debris creates deeper holding pools and cleans spawning gravel.

Large accumulations of woody debris, particularly in smaller water courses or fish passes, can block access to migratory fish or cause accelerated bank erosion. Our teams of water bailiffs walk key tributaries prior to the spawning season and remove any blockage likely to Large debris blockage on the Coiltie Burn



create a barrier to the upstream passage of fish. This process is repeated in the spring to ensure free passage of salmon and sea trout smolts on their journey to the sea.

In spring 2013 a large blockage was identified on the Coiltie Burn in Urquahart Bay. The effects of this accumulation of woody debris were made worse given the low river levels being experienced at the time. Following consultation with SEPA and SNH, a narrow channel was created by hand around the blockage to permit the downstream passage of smolts. Permission was also granted to trim the blockage later in the season, however we believe that adult fish will be able to pass the obstruction during a spate.

Unlicensed River Works

The Water Environment (Controlled Activities) (Scotland) Regulations 2011 (CAR) regulates activities associated with the water environment. Since 1 April 2006 it has been an offence to undertake the following activities without a CAR authorisation:

- Any activity liable to cause pollution of the water environment, including discharges of polluting matter and disposal of waste sheep dip and waste pesticides;
- Abstraction of water from the water environment;
- Construction, alteration or operation of impounding works (e.g. dams and weirs) in surface water or wetlands;
- Carrying out building or engineering works (a) in inland water (other than groundwater) or wetlands; or
 (b) in the vicinity of inland water or wetlands and having or likely to have a significant adverse effect on the water environment;
- Artificial recharge or augmentation of groundwater;
- The direct or indirect discharge, and any activity likely to cause a direct or indirect discharge, into groundwater of any hazardous substance or other pollutant; and



• Any other activity which directly or indirectly has or is likely to have a significant adverse impact on the water environment.

Despite the introduction of the CAR regulations, examples of unlicensed works continue to be discovered on the Ness system. One example identified by the NDSFB in 2013 is the suspected dredging of approximately 150 metres of the River Tarff in Fort Augustus (resulting in the loss of juvenile habitat). This is currently under investigation by SEPA.

The NDSFB will continue to locate and report any unlicensed river works and work to ensure that damage to habitat is restored. Further to this efforts will be made to education riparian owners on the potential negative impacts of such works.

Suspected dredged channel on the River Tarff



NBFT Habitat Survey

The NBFT has completed a detailed Habitat Survey across the Ness system on behalf of the NDSFB. Catchmentwide fish habitat surveys are an integral part of fisheries management and research. The Scottish Fisheries Coordination Centre (SFCC) habitat survey methodology records detailed information relating to salmonid habitat in a standardised way. The information gathered can subsequently be used to:

- Evaluate quality of habitat for juvenile salmon and trout;
- Identify stream stretches that may benefit from habitat improvements;
- Target areas for stocking;
- Identify and classify point pollution sources;
- Identify and grade obstacles to fish migration;
- Identify location and type of past or existing channel/bank modifications; and
- Identify the potential location of salmon and trout spawning gravels.

The results of this survey provide us with a baseline from which to develop future management priorities and strategies. A copy of the report can be found on our website at <u>www.ness.dsfb.org.uk</u>.



DEVELOP A COHESIVE PLAN TO TACKLE THE PROBLEMS OF THE UPPER PART OF THE SYSTEM

The abundance of salmon in the Upper River Garry has declined over the last fifty years and is showing little sign of recovery. This is despite several decades of supplementary stocking undertaken as mitigation for loss of habitat following hydroelectric development in the 1950s and subsequently a regime of easing passage (not stocking), supported by catch and release. Historical annual returns of up to 600 to 800 salmon have now reduced to a five year average of 40 salmon.

The fish barrier (heck) and trap above Loch Poulary, constructed to trap ascending fish so that they could be used to produce eggs for stocking (screens removed in 2004 allowing access to salmon)



This is in contrast to the neighbouring Upper River Moriston, with similar characteristics in terms of size and environment, which has shown signs of recovery under the same management regime. This begs the question as to why the populations in the Moriston are recovering whilst those in the Garry are not. Further to this, what action can be taken to restore the Upper Garry stock to that which would be expected given the amount and quality of accessible habitat available.

In an effort to answer these questions, Dr Eric Verspoor from the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI) Rivers and Lochs Institute (RLI) was commissioned by the NDSFB (in partnership with SSE and NBFT) to carry out a scoping study for the development of an Atlantic salmon stock restoration programme for the Garry tributary of the Ness system. This report was completed in October 2012 and identifies potential cause for the decline, factors limiting recovery and makes recommendations for a restoration strategy. A copy of the report can be viewed on the 'Publications' page of our website (<u>www.ness.dsfb.org.uk</u>).



Potential causes for the decline in annual returns include:

- Decrease in Marine Survival reducing expected annual returns to approximately 200 to 300 fish;
- Habitat loss (approximately 40%) due to loss of access and flooding associated with the hydroelectric dams, further reducing expected annual counts approximately 120 to 180; and
- A further 40% of habitat made inaccessible due to the fish barrier (heck) and trap at Loch Poulary, further reducing expected production to 40 to 60 fish.

The heck at Loch Poulary was designed to trap ascending fish to that they could be used to produce eggs for stocking. The barrier was removed in 2004 resulting in an increase in juvenile habitat accessible to salmon, however adult returns have not increases as is the case on the Upper Moriston. This suggests that other factors may be having an impact, such as:

- Environmental changes associated with afforestation of parts of the catchment with conifers;
- Increases in predation impacts associated with introduced pike and minnows;
- Ecological and genetic interactions with escaped farm salmon which may be maladapted to the habitat; or
- Shortage of spawning habitat directly above juvenile habitat may be leading to an underutilisation of habitat.

The factors limiting the recovery of the Upper Garry stock appear to be multiple. Dr Verspoor's report recommends that four basic management responses to stock restoration on the Upper Garry are possible:

- A Do nothing and let the system recover by itself;
- B Intervene using habitat improvement;
- C Intervene using supportive breeding and supplemental stocking; and
- D Both B & C

The NDSFB and their partners are currently investigating the feasibility of progressing Response D as the best way to sustainably restore the historical stock abundance. This involves the development of a set of carefully targeted, designed and linked enhancement initiatives, encompassing habitat improvement and stock rehabilitation through supportive breeding and supplementary stocking.



WORK WITH THE SALMON FARMING INDUSTRY TO ENSURE THAT SALMON FARMING ACTIVITIES PRESENT NO RISK TO THE WILD SALMON POPULATION.

The Board appreciates the commercial benefits that salmon farming has brought to the Highlands. However, in common with the rest of the wild salmon community, the Ness Board has concerns regarding the practice of rearing of farm salmon smolts in waters that are connected to river systems that contain, or could contain, wild fish populations.

Escapes of farm salmon have the potential to result in interbreeding and competition with wild fish, in turn leading to reduced genetic fitness and spawning success. At present there are two smolt rearing facilities that are operating within our system – Marine Harvest in Loch Garry and Migdale in Loch Ness. While the commercial rearing of smolts in open cages continues to take place within our system, we are of the view that this presents a significant risk to our wild fish populations.

An example of a suspected escapee salmon smolt of farmed origin



We believe that the aim should be to rear farm salmon in "closed containment" systems, thereby obviating any risk of introgression with wild fish populations. The Board will continue to engage constructively with Marine Harvest and other aquaculture industry operators within our system to find a way to achieve this.



WORK WITH SSE TO MITIGATE THE EFFECTS OF THEIR PRESENT AND FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS ON THE SALMON POPULATION AND TO ENSURE THAT THEY FULLY COMPLY WITH THEIR OBLIGATIONS IN RESPECT OF THEIR EXISTING FACILITIES.

Large scale hydro-electric schemes have been a feature of the Ness system for many years. Several dams were built in the 1950's on the Moriston and Garry. A pump storage system was built in the 1990's at Foyers and in the 2000's a traditional facility Glendoe near Fort Augustus. A further pump storage system is proposed at Balmacaan and is currently in the planning stage.

The effect that these schemes have on salmon stocks has been debated over the years. While the factors causing the decline of salmon in the Ness system are yet to be fully understood, the presence of hydro activities and dams on a river system is widely believed to have a detrimental impact both in the short and longer term. However, the fact that hydroelectric schemes bring significant economic benefits to the highlands means that they are here to stay. It is therefore important that we work closely with their operator SSE to ensure that the impacts of their existing and future developments on migratory salmonid populations are minimised.

The Board enjoys a positive and constructive relationship with SSE, with their representative invited to attend our board meetings in a non-voting capacity. In addition to this the Board benefits from access to the data collected by the fish counters on the Dundreggan and Invergarry dams.



Adult salmon passing over the counting flume at Dundreggan Dam, River Moriston (taken from above)

A historical mitigation agreement between SSE and the Board specified they would pay the costs of providing, operating and maintaining a hatchery in compensation for spawning grounds lost on the River Garry and River Moriston due to the hydro schemes. This approach was unsuccessful for a number of reasons and as a result the hatchery has not been in operation for some years. The SSE funding has instead been diverted to establishing the underlying issues which effected the operation of the hatchery and the more general problems apparent in the upper river system. The constructive approach demonstrated by SSE is warmly welcomed by the NDSFB and we look forward to working with them in implementation of 'best practice' mitigation measures.



IMPLEMENT A CATCH AND RELEASE POLICY WHICH SPREADS THE CONSERVATION EFFORT EVENLY ACROSS THE SYSTEM AND IS STRAIGHTFORWARD TO POLICE

Conservation measures introduced by the NDSFB in partnership with anglers have resulted in a significant improvement in the overall release rate which as of 2012 stands at 75% of the total catch. In 2012 this equated to the release of approximately 1,500,000 eggs back into the system and has the potential to safeguard the return of up to 1,500 adult salmon over the coming years.



Proportion of salmon and grilse released on the Ness System (1994-2012)

The Ness system release rate now is higher than the 73% national average release rate (recorded in 2011), however the release effort by individual proprietors varied from 100% down to just 36%, indicating room for improvement. 'Spring' salmon release rates have shown the greatest improvement, rising from 0% in 1994 to a very respectable 97% in 2012 (equating to the release of approximately 590,000 eggs back into the system with potential to safeguard the return of up to 590 adult salmon of 'spring' origin over the coming years).



Proportion of 'spring' salmon released on the Ness System (1994-2012)



The Ness system 'spring' release rate is now significantly higher than the 91% national average release rate recorded in 2011. Despite the success to date and with Ness 'spring' salmon catches in continued decline, it is important that efforts continue to maintain, if not further increase, release rates.

These fish are important not only in terms of their conservation value, but also their economic value. This is particularly true on the upper tributaries such as the Moriston, Oich and the Garry for which the 'spring' fish make up a large component of the rod catches. A number of studies have shown that anglers are capable of catching a surprisingly large proportion of spring salmon (estimates of around 30%). Each fish that is caught and killed reduces the number of fish available to spawn.

In addition to this, scale sample analysis on other rivers has indicated that a proportion of these early running fish may be 'repeat spawners', i.e. fish that return to spawn on more than one occasion. The presence of these early repeat spawners is important, particularly given the fact that the spring component of the Ness salmon population is known to be in long-term decline. These 'veterans' are acting to 'fill the gaps' left by poor returns of maiden spawners. They also remind us of the importance of returning as many spring salmon as possible. By removing even the smallest of fish you may prevent it from spawning not just once, but even two or three times.

There is still room for improvement in Multi Sea Winter (MSW) salmon release rates (88% in 2012) by releasing a greater proportion of summer and autumn salmon. The grilse release rate stood at 58% in 2012. As both MSW salmon and grilse share the same genetics, the best way to protect the overall salmon population is to practice catch and release for all components.



A fresh run 10lb 'spring' salmon released back to the River Oich in April 2013



ENSURE A COMPLETE AND ACCURATE RETURN OF ALL FISH CAUGHT IS MADE TO THE BOARD

Information relating to run size is an essential management tool for any DSFB. Catch returns are the main indicator of adult run size available for the Ness system. It is therefore vital that the Board receives complete and accurate returns of all fish caught and vital that the information is made available as soon as is practically possible to inform management decisions.

Historical problems relating to the timing and quality of catch returns in the Ness district meant that the Board became reliant on the data collected by MSS via its statutory returns. The problem with this is that there is a year's delay before it is published in its final form. This limits the Board's ability to detect or react to changes in adult runs size and to implement appropriate management actions.

As a result the Board has in recent years used its powers under The Conservation of Salmon (Collection of Statistics) (Scotland) Regulations 2006 to request catch data twice per year. These regulations allow District Salmon Fishery Boards to require any proprietor or occupier of a salmon fishery in its district to provide catch statistics relating to the *number, species, description and weight and method and date of capture of salmon and/or sea trout caught or caught and released* in that salmon fishery for each calendar month. These statistics can be required at intervals of not less than six months.

This means that if a statutory request for catch data is made in July (following the 'spring' period), then the next statutory request cannot be made until the following January. Although this makes the data available quicker than it was before, it would be preferable for catches to be available to the board as soon as possible after the end of the season.

We are therefore keen to develop a system by which individual fisheries can report their catches on a weekly or monthly basis. This will most likely be via a secure page on our website where proprietors can register their catches, with the total weekly or monthly catches being shared with those participating.

ENSURE THE SYSTEM REMAINS AS FREE AS POSSIBLE FROM NON-NATIVE SPECIES.

Biosecurity is a key issue for the Ness catchment and involves taking steps to make sure that good practices are in place to reduce and minimise the risk of spreading invasive non-native species. Most anglers are now aware of the threat of *Gyrodactylus salaris* but fewer people are aware of the threats posed by other species.

The Ness catchment already contains many species that are not native to the Highlands such as Japanese knotweed and giant hogweed. To varying degrees these all have the potential to impact negatively on the aquatic environment. N&BFT maintain a stock of disinfectants to prevent the introduction of *Gyrodactylus salaris* etc and can offer advice on correct procedures to prevent the introduction of this and many other undesirable species. The American signal crayfish is also known to be present in a neighbouring catchment and so poses a very real risk to the Ness system.

In 2010 a plan was drafted by N&BFT in an attempt to counter the many threats posed by invasive non-native species. This project was funded by <u>Scottish Natural Heritage</u> (SNH), the <u>Esmée Fairbairn Foundation</u> and the <u>Scottish Government</u>. The aim of the planning process was to put in place protocols to try and prevent new introductions of such species and to deal with those, where possible, that are already here.

Mink control has continued with the Ness Board working closely with N&BFT, who are a key partner in the Scottish Mink Initiative. This Initiative is highly collaborative in nature and has input from numerous fishery trusts and boards, SNH, Forestry Commission Scotland, Scottish Wildlife Trust, University of Aberdeen and Oxford University in addition to gamekeepers and members of the public. Mink have been showed to have negative effects on a broad range of wildlife species of both conservation and economic value including fish species.



WORK WITH AND THROUGH THE **NBFT** AND ALL OTHER INTERESTED BODIES TO PROMOTE AND PUBLICISE THE ENVIRONMENTAL, LEISURE, TOURISM AND HERITAGE BENEFITS THAT A VIBRANT AND SUSTAINABLE SALMON FISHING RESOURCE WILL BRING TO THE **N**ESS **D**ISTRICT AND ITS INHABITANTS.

The Board has continued to work closely with the NBFT and to provide it with financial support. Since its inception NBFT has engaged in the provision of a wide range of annual educational and outreach activities such as Salmon in the Classroom, electric fishing demonstrations and the provision of presentations to a wider range of bodies and organisations.

The Ness Board is currently working in partnership with the Rivers and Lochs Institute at the University of the Highlands and Islands to promote the concept of an 'Inverness Salmon Festival'. The Festival would be a celebration of the Atlantic salmon as a flagship species symbolising efforts to conserve and enhance the ecological and socio-economic value of the Highland's aquatic resources.

The key outcomes of the Inverness Salmon Festival will be as follows:

- Greater public awareness of the Atlantic salmon, its importance as a key indicator to the health of the river and its contribution to the wider economy;
- Increased participation in water related activities such as angling, canoeing, wildlife watching and boating.
- Increased tourism associated with a wider awareness and understanding of the value of the aquatic environment in the Highlands (and perhaps through attendance at the Inverness Salmon Festival).
- Huge educational and economic benefits to the Inverness area, developing as the Inverness Salmon Festival grows year on year.

The concept of the festival has been presented to the Highland Council who are keen for it to feature as part of their Highland Homecoming event from September to October 2014. Highland Homecoming is a celebration of contemporary Highland culture, beginning with the Inverness Highland Meeting and culminating with Mod Naiseanta Rioghail - The Royal National Mod. It will see a huge amount of activity take place in the Highland Capital, including the World Masters Highland Games and celebrations surrounding the 150th anniversary of the Northern Meeting Park.



DEVELOP SUCH SYSTEMS, MANAGEMENT STRUCTURES AND METHODOLOGIES AS ARE REQUIRED TO IMPLEMENT THESE STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES.

In 2011 Strutt & Parker intimated its desire to step down from the role as Clerk to the Board. As a result the decision was made to employ a part time Chief Executive Officer. This role would encompass the duties of Clerk but would also include taking forward and implementing decisions of the Board and putting in place more robust administrative processes, thus enabling the Board to be better informed in its decision making.

Over the last three years much was been achieved with regards to administration of the board, compliance with statutes and codes of governance and the provision of sound financial controls. Further to this, the development of the Board's first Strategic Plan gave clear direction on the future direction of the board. However, the work that has been completed to date has served to highlight what still needs to be done rather than to bring about the improvements that we seek.

For this reason the board decided to take the next step and employ a full time Chief Executive officer/River Director to further the achievements to date and implement its strategies. The Directors responsibilities also include admin and governance, coordinating responses to consultations and day to day management of the Board's affairs. Further to this the Director position is 'hands on' with involvement in enforcement and river management activities.

The Board are delighted to have secured the employment of Chris Conroy to the Chief Executive Officer/River Director role. Chris holds a Batchelor's degree with honours in Applied Biology and a Master's Degree in Aquatic Resource Management. Further to this, he has over 16 years' experience working as a fisheries manager in both the public and private sectors. Having most recently held the position of Superintendent/Biologist with the River Naver Fisheries; he is already familiar with the challenges facing Scotland's wild salmon populations.



Wider Initiatives

NESS SYSTEM SCOPING STUDY

Given the continued long-term decline in rod catches and following the successful completion of a scoping study on the River Garry, the Ness Board are in the process of commissioning a wider study covering the system as a whole. This will include a review of all available background information, a critical assessment of factors affecting the character of the stock and its abundance and development of restoration options. A restoration strategy will then be developed. Potential restoration options are likely to include addressing factors limiting production and supportive breeding.

RIVER NESS SALMON CONSERVATION CENTRE

Historically, salmon restoration has focused on the stocking of cultured fish. Recent research shows its impact on wild stocks is often at best neutral and may even be counter-productive, but if carefully considered and implemented can be beneficial. In all cases, the outcome will be highly dependent on state of a wild stock and how any stocking is carried out. Thus any stocking programmes must be carefully tailored to ensure that they contribute to stock recovery. Achieving success is also dependent on training and educating salmon managers in salmon restoration science and increasing public awareness of the restoration challenge and the role they can play in overcoming it.

- The Need for River Specific Management There is no "off the shelf" or "one size fits all" solution to stock restoration. The salmon stock of each river, and of its constituent breeding populations, presents a unique management challenge.
- The Need for River Specific Research Defining what the restoration problems are and how each can be addressed can only be gained through river specific research, guided by the general body of knowledge of salmon biology.
- The Need for Community Education Effective salmon management underpinned by sound science and the latest understanding, requires the training and education of existing and future salmon managers as well as increasing public awareness.

Subject to the Ness system scoping study and meeting the identified needs for successful Atlantic salmon restoration in the River Ness, the NDSFB is investigating the possibility of developing a dedicated salmon research, management and education facility involving a unique partnership between the Ness District Salmon Fisheries Board (NDSFB), the Ness and Beauly Fisheries Trust (NBFT) and the Rivers and Lochs Institute, Inverness College University of the Highlands and Islands (RLI). The facility would encompass physical facilities for the rearing and study of the Ness salmon stock in support of salmon management, including for stocking as appropriate, as well as supporting facilities for research and education.



Ness and Beauly Fisheries Trust

In discharging its duties the Board has worked closely with the Ness & Beauly Fisheries Trust and support the Trust financially. A short summary of the work of the Trust is given below.

The Ness & Beauly Fisheries Trust welcomes Chris Conroy, Director of Ness District Salmon Fishery Board, to the Ness catchment and look forward to developing a fruitful working partnership with him in the future.

The key focus of the Trust's 2013 fieldwork programme was the gathering of baseline juvenile salmon abundance data for the Upper and Lower Garry system in preparation for the commencement of an anticipated restoration project for that part of the catchment which is currently being developed. This resulted in the most intensive surveying programme ever undertaken by NBFT within the Garry catchment. Results suggest a wide disparity between juvenile abundance downstream and upstream of Invergarry Dam. Small tissue samples were also taken from a proportion of the juveniles captured for future genetic analyses, should this be required.

Elsewhere within the catchment, survey effort was largely directed towards areas where remedial efforts had been undertaken in the recent past or where NBFT believes that remedial actions are urgently needed. Examples of monitoring to assess the success of measures already undertaken include upstream of the fish passes at Ceannacroc on the Moriston and the Holm Burn in Inverness. On the Farigaig, surveys were undertaken upstream of the bridge apron described elsewhere in this report. The results suggesting that year classes of salmon are absent which in turn strengthens the belief that action to improve fish passage is urgently required. With low water levels persisting in the River Ness into early autumn, NBFT took the opportunity to undertake surveys on the main stem of the river. This is ordinarily logistically very difficult due to the width of the Ness. Results from the River Ness where ostensibly encouraging. The downside of the lack of rainfall was dangerously low water levels in some watercourses which resulted in 'fish rescues' being undertaken by NBFT in some instances.

Another important part of the work programme during 2013 was participation in the Pearls in Peril Project (<u>http://www.rafts.org.uk/pearls-in-peril/</u>). The River Moriston is a Special Area of Conservation for Pearl Mussels and Atlantic salmon and a number of actions are planned within the Moriston catchment as part of the project. Many issues such as pollution and land use that have the potential to impact negatively on pearl mussel populations are equally relevant to fish populations and the actions taken as part of the project should help safeguard the important Moriston pearl mussel and salmon populations.

Education provision remained high on the agenda in 2013 largely as a result of collaboration with the Moray Firth Trout Initiative (<u>http://www.morayfirthtrout.org/</u>). A number of school visits and field trips were completed during the year in addition to more general public events such as a hunt for fish and aquatic insects at the Little Isle in Inverness undertaken in conjunction with the Highland Council Ranger Service.

NBFT commissions or undertakes research where such research has the potential to be directly relevant to the management of fish stocks. An example of this is the FASMOP salmon genetics project which is now close to completion. Once available, the report from this project will be available on the Trust website at <u>www.nbft.co.uk</u>. The report for additional and more targeted genetics work commissioned by NBFT is also expected in the near future. It is the belief of NBFT that the genetics research undertaken will profoundly influence the management of the salmon resource within the Ness catchment. In 2013 a trial tagging scheme for adult salmon was initiated by Ness system ghillies with the support of NBFT to assess if the technique could be utilised to gain insights into salmon recapture rates by anglers as well as the migration of salmon within the catchment. It is expected that the trials will be further developed in 2014.



Compliance with Good Governance Obligations

Statutory 'good governance' obligations are placed on District Salmon Fishery Boards as defined in law by section 46 of the Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries (Consolidation) (Scotland) Act 2003. They comprise of the original obligations placed on Boards by the 2003 Act together with those introduced through amendments of the 2003 Act by the Aquaculture and Fisheries (Scotland) Act 2013 which came into force on the 16th September 2013.

The purpose of the obligations is to enhance openness, transparency and accountability of the management of salmon fisheries by District Salmon Fishery Boards. They bring together existing best practice to ensure that all Boards act in a manner consistent with bodies operating in the public sphere.

Key activities covered by these obligations include:

- Annual Reports and Accounts
- Meetings of the Board
- Complaints Procedures; and
- Register of Members Interests

This section of the report demonstrates how we have complied with each of the key obligations since the coming into force of the Aquaculture and Fisheries (Scotland) Act 2013 on the 16th September 2013. We will continue to follow the advice and guidance produced by both Marine Scotland and the Association of Salmon Fishery Boards over the coming year to ensure continued compliance with our good governance obligations.

ANNUAL REPORT AND ACCOUNTS

This annual report including accounts to the year ending 15th May 2013 will be published on the 'Publications' page our website (<u>www.ness.dsfb.org.uk</u>) together with those for previous years. Hard copies will also available from the Clerk of the board on request.

MEETINGS

Following the coming into force of the Aquaculture and Fisheries (Scotland) Act 2013, an ordinary meeting of the Board was held at the Inverness Caledonian Thistle Football Ground on 19th September followed directly by a meeting of qualified proprietors for the purpose of triennial elections.

Both of these meetings were publicised by means of the 'News' page of our website (<u>www.ness.dsfb.org.uk</u>) and circulation of a written notice to all qualified proprietors. No members of the public chose to attend. The minutes of these meetings will be available for viewing on the publications page following approval at the next Board meeting.

The 2013 annual meeting of qualified proprietors will take place on the 12th December 2013. This was publicised on the 11th November 2013 via our website, written notice to qualified proprietors and by advertisement in Grahams Tackle Shop in Inverness. Notification of the meeting was also emailed to the Scottish Government.

A Public meeting will be held in early 2014 at which the agreed and finalised annual report and accounts will be presented to the wider public, together with an explanation of what is planned over the next year.



COMPLAINTS

The Board has set up and maintains a complaints procedure which can be viewed on the 'Good Governance' page of our website (<u>www.ness.dsfb.org.uk</u>). This procedure was produced on the 28th August 2013 and approved at the Board Meeting on the 19th September 2013 and remains unaltered.

During the last 12 months the Ness District Salmon Fishery Board received one complaint. The complaint was received from a proprietor of salmon fisheries in the Board's District via letter. It related to the incorrect invoicing of interest on a fishery assessment which had already been paid. This was due to the timing of the Board's Bank Statement in relation to receipt of payment. Measures have since been put in place to prevent this happening again in the future.

This complaint was resolved at Stage 1 of our complaints procedure, with a written response sent to the complainant within 20 working days. No further correspondence has been received from the complainant relating to the issue.

MEMBERS INTERESTS

The register of member's interests can be viewed on the 'Good Governance' page of our website (<u>www.ness.dsfb.org.uk</u>). We have included a standing item at each Board meeting inviting Board members to declare new or amend existing interests. All such instances are recorded in the minutes of these meetings.

FORTHCOMING MEETINGS

The provisional dates of forthcoming Board meeting are as follows. Please note that these may be subject to change, with notification of the final dates being posted on our website and circulated to proprietors at least 21 days prior to the meeting.

- 23rd January 2014 Annual Public Meeting
- 20th March 2014 Board Meeting
- 19th June 2014 Board Meeting
- 18th September 2014 Board Meeting
- 18th December 2014 Annual Meeting of Qualified Proprietors and Board Meeting

The NDSFB invites the public to attend all of our meeting, however certain items of business may be held in private. Please note that the legislation only makes provisions for members of the public to propose matters for consideration and speak at the Annual Public Meeting. However, the NDSFB may at its own discretion wish to give interested parties the right to do so at other meeting,



Financial Summary

CHAIRMAN'S FOREWORD

The Accounts for the year ended 15 May 2013 are included in this section of the report and show a satisfactory financial situation for the Board with a net surplus for the year of £3,767.00. The Boards reserve position remains satisfactory but given the work still to be to be carried out to improve the system over the next few years, the surplus is expected to reduce over time.

Michael Martin Chairman



Ness District Salmon Fishery Board Accounts for the year ended 15 May 2013



N	ess District Salmon Fishery Board
	Information
Accountants	Frame Kennedy Chartered Accountants Metropolitan House 31 - 33 High Street Inverness IV1 1HT
Bankers	Clydesdale Bank 38 High Street Banchory AB31 5SR
Chief executive / clerk	Chris Conroy Conon Water Cottage Kirkhill Inverness-shire IV5 7PG



Ness District Salmon Fishery Board	
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Income and expenditure account	2 - 3
Balance sheet	4 - 5
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Ness District Salmon Fishery Board **Chartered Accountants' Report** on the Unaudited Financial Statements of Ness District Salmon Fishery Board In accordance with the engagement letter, we have prepared the accounts of Ness District Salmon Fishery Board on pages 2 to 7 from the accounting records and information and explanations supplied to us. This report is made to you, in accordance with the terms of our engagement. Our work has been undertaken to enable us to prepare the accounts on your behalf and for no other purpose. To the fullest extent permitted by law, we do not accept or assume responsibility to anyone other than the Board, for our work, or for this report. We have carried out this engagement in accordance with best practice guidance issued by the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Scotland and have complied with the ethical guidance laid down by the Institute relating to members undertaking the preparation of accounts. You have acknowledged on the balance sheet for the year ended 15 May 2013 your responsibility for the accounts. We have not been instructed to carry out an audit of the accounts. For this reason, we have not verified the accuracy or completeness of the accounting records or information and explanations you have given to us and we do not, therefore, express any opinion on the accounts. Wike Keried Frame Kennedy **Chartered** Accountants **Metropolitan House** 31 - 33 High Street Inverness IV1 1HT Page 1



Ness District Salmon Fishery Board

Income and expenditure account for the year ended 15 May 2013

	2013		2012	
	£	£	£	£
Income				
Assessments on Proprietors		105,177		98,215
Scottish & Southern Energy Plc		66,397		63,886
Mink project		2,000		_
1 5		173,574		162,101
Administrative expenses				
Bailiff salaries	77,580		53,479	
Staff training, meeting costs	1,370		605	
Charge for Conon Boat	1,677		1,608	
Kincurdie Netting Operation	-		5,000	
Insurance, health and safety	5,095		3,203	
Repairs and renewals	631		2,116	
Stationery, advertising and telephone	7,866		3,745	
Moray Firth Sea Trout Project	-		500	
Lower Ness Invasives Project	-		500	
Scoping study	2,468		5,202	
Motor expenses	13,467		10,386	
Legal and professional fees	600		342	
Secretarial support	2,880		360	
Audit and Clerk's expenses	10,745		11,016	
Bookkeeping	2,131		1,800	
Bank interest and charges	257		218	
Ness & Beauly Fisheries Trust	30,000		30,000	
Fishery Board/ASDF subscription	2,199		2,468	
Catch and release	2,713		2,476	
Sundry expenses	512		333	
Habitat improvement	720		-	
Depreciation plant and equipment	579		631	
Depreciation motor vehicles	5,701		6,486	
Loss/(gain) on disposals of tangible assets	-		535	
		(169,191)		(143,009)
Operating surplus		4,383		19,092

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		N. Distinct	Et la martina		
		Ness District Salmo	on Fishery Board		
(Other income and expenses				
	other meonie and expenses				
1	nterest payable				
I	Hire purchase interest	6	516	1,634	
			(616)		(1.624)
			(010)		(1,034)
1	Net surplus		3,767		17,458
		Pag	ge 3		
		이 아직 호텔은 같.		н	



	Ness Dist	rict Salmon F	ishery Board		
	2	Balance she as at 15 May 2	eet 2013		
	Notes	201 £	13 £	201 £	£
Fixed assets					
Tangible assets	1		19,697		24,700
Current assets					
Stocks and work-in-progress	2	98		211	
Debtors	3	34,905		16,015	
Cash at bank and in hand		76,605		82,668	
		111,608		98,894	
Current liabilities	4				
Other creditors		5,585		7,313	
Accruals		16,282		7,185	
		21,867		14,498	
Net current assets			89,741		84,396
1 otal assets less current			109 438		109.096
naomnes			10,100		10,000
Long-term liabilities	5		(4,567)		(7,992)
Net assets			104,871		101,104
Conital account					
Brought forward at 16 May 20	12		101,104		83,646
Surplus for the year			3,767		17,458
			104.871		101 104
			104,071		101,104
					and a second sec

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Ness District Salmon Fishery Board
as at 15 May 2013
In the opinion of the board, the statement of accounts for the year ending 15 May 2013 gives a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the Board at the end of the financial year in question and of the incoming resources and application of resources of the Board in that financial year.
We approve these accounts and confirm that we have made available all relevant records and information for their preparation.
andres Raduncan C.M.
Andrew R Duncan Chris Conroy
Chairman Chief executive / Clerk
Date: 16th OCTOBER 2015
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Ness District Salmon Fishery Board Notes to the accounts for the year ended 15 May 2013

1.	Tangible assets
~ *	0

		Plant and machinery Eq	Plant and nachinery Equipment		Boat	Total
		£	£	£	£	£
	Cost					
	At 16 May 2012	27,594	-	41,673	250	69,517
	Additions	240	1,038	-	-	1,278
	At 15 May 2013	27,834	1,038	41,673	250	70,795
	Depreciation					
	At 16 May 2012	25,702	-	18,867	248	44,817
	Charge for the year	488	91	5,701	1	6,281
	At 15 May 2013	26,190	91	24,568	249	51,098
	Net book values					
	At 15 May 2013	1,644	947	17,105	1	19,697
	At 15 May 2012	1,892	-	22,806	2	24,700
2.	Stocks				2013	2012
					£	£
	Stock of catch and release				98	211
3.	Debtors				2013	2012
					£	£
	Assessment arrears				29,240	5,355
	Prepayments and accrued income				5,665	10,660

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34,905

16,015



	Mass District Solmer Disherry Decad		
	Notes to the accounts		
	for the year ended 15 May 2013		
4	Current liabilities	2012	2012
-2.	Current natifices	£	£
	Net obligations under finance leases		
	and hire purchase contracts	3,425	3,425
	Taxes and social security costs	326	338
	Other creditors	1,834	3,550
	Accruals and deferred income	16,282	7,185
		21,867	14,498
5.	Long-term liabilities	2013	2012
		£	£
	Net obligations under finance leases		
	and hire purchase contracts	4,567	7,992

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Key Priorities for the Forthcoming Year

In addition to the delivery of its core objectives in relation to fisheries science, management and enforcement, the Board proposes to progress the following key objectives over the coming year:

• Efficiently and effectively manage the Board, through:

- Full compliance with all statues including the new good governance requirements;
- Compliance with the ASFB/RAFTS Code of Governance for DSFBs;
- *Provision of efficient administration;*
- Ensuring sound financial control; and
- Being a good employer.
- Production of a 'Fisheries Enforcement Strategy' which considers:
 - Deployment of new technologies;
 - The development of intelligence led policing;
 - Training and development of Water Bailiffs;
 - Effective deployment of volunteer and part time bailiffs; and
 - Greater sharing of resources with neighbouring fishery boards
- Continue to work in close partnership with and financially support the NBFT to help ensure:
 - The conservation and maintenance of the diversity of salmon and sea trout populations in the Ness system and to conserve their aquatic environment;
 - The collection of accurate, adequate and up-to-date information on the status of fish stocks, their habitats and exploitation to facilitate a science based approach to fisheries management; and
 - Education of the public and any association, company, local authority, administrative, or governmental agency or public body or representative body.

• Produce an up to date 'Fisheries Management Plan' for the Ness System in Partnership with the NBFT and other key partners, which includes:

- The identification of limiting factors and provision of associated management actions;
- An economic development plan which recognising the Ness system as a world class fishing destination;
- The identification of monitoring and research requirements; and
- Staff levels and development.

• Ensure delivery of on-going projects, including:

- Working with partners to investigate the feasibility of progressing the Upper Garry Project;
- Development and delivery of an inaugural 'Inverness Salmon Festival' in September 2014;
- Delivery of a Scoping Study to Define an Optimal Strategy for Atlantic Salmon Stock Restoration of the Ness River System;
- Developing the concept of the River Ness Salmon Conservation Centre, encompassing physical facilities for the rearing and study of the Ness salmon stock in support of salmon management (including for stocking as appropriate) as well as supporting facilities for research and education; and
- Progression of the short and long-term buyout of commercial netting interests in the Moray Firth.

Catch & Release for Salmon An Angler's Guide





Conon Water Cottage Kirkhill Inverness-shire IV5 7PG

Telephone: Webpage: 01463 831398 www.ness.dsfb.org

NESS DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD

A statutory body responsible for the **protection** and **enhancement** of salmon and sea trout fisheries in the Ness District. Constituted under the 1862 and 1868 Salmon Fisheries Legislation, subsequently amended in the Salmon Act 1986 and the Salmon Conservation (Scotland) Act 2001 and more recently amalgamated under the Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries (Consolidation) (Scotland)

Chairman: Michael Martin River Director & Clerk: Chris Conroy email: michael@martin7930.freeserve.co.uk email: ceo@ndsfb.org