



COMMITTEE MEETING
Wednesday 20th March 2019, 10:30-13:00

Freshwater Fisheries Laboratory, Pitlochry

MINUTES

1. **Attendees:** Jo Girvan, Marcus Walters, Jamie Ribbens, Sean Dugan, Alan Wells, Anthony Watkins, Simon Dryden, Bob Laughton

2. **Apologies for absence:** John Armstrong, Pamela Esson, James Hunt, Kjersti Birkeland,

3. **Minutes of previous meeting, review of action points and matters arising**

The Angling Diary provider has quoted a reduced fee of £1200 for 2 years based on much reduced usage. There may also be a ~£300 fee for exporting all data from the site.

ACTION: JH to terminate Angling Diary subscription.

CARRIED FORWARD: SFCC to revise 5-year vision before the end of 2019.

4. **Manager's report including finances**

SD ran through his quarterly report circulated prior to the meeting including the following:

Finances

- The latest cash flow report and projections to year-end were presented
- A minimum surplus of £3750 is expected at year-end
- If Egton do indeed invoice for database development then SFCC will break-even
- Stop net grant has been approved and has been transferred to SFCC
- SD pension and NI contributions outstanding
- Various additional expenditure items expected before year-end including biologists meeting venue payment, angling diary subscription, Microsoft Excel and scale reading training fees.

SFCC activities for January, February and March included:

- Liaison with new SFCC members Brora DSFB and Lochaber Fisheries Trust
- Member support including a mapping training day with Nith Catchment Fisheries Trust
- Ongoing database and mapping support provided to members including SEPA
- Organising the SFCC Biologists meeting
- Assistance provided to Tay DSFB during completion of Fisheries Management Plan
- 2019 training programme organised including Microsoft Excel, Mapping, Habitat and Electrofishing courses
- FWPM survey, drone survey, and barrier assessment, courses currently in planning stages
- SD, JG and Bob Laughton have completed their contributions to the Introduction to electrofishing manual
- The Team Leader manual still requires some further work before completion

ACTION: SD to remind Egton again to invoice for database development work.

ACTION: Hold advanced Microsoft Excel training course in November 2019.

JG mentioned the fish survey guidance for developers document proposed by Tommy McDermott (Trex Ecology/Forth Rivers Trust) and whether SFCC would consider part funding this. JR and MW felt strongly that this would need to be consistent with SEPA guidelines (for example on fish rescues) and also that SFCC members would need to have an opportunity for consultation before any adoption of the guidelines by SFCC.

ACTION: JG and AW to meet to discuss.

5. **Objectives for 2019-2020**

Committee reviewed priorities for the coming year and were generally in support of the proposed objectives but felt SFCC should not raise the expectation that all of the proposed objectives can all be achieved this year. For example several are out of SD's control and rely on the input and lead from Marine Scotland.

ACTION: SD to add estimated time requirements for each objective.

It was felt that the appraisal of data storage for electro-fishing and smolt data was a priority objective for 2019-2020. Support to members also continues to be essential and needs to be done strategically by identifying the needs of each individual member on an annual basis. Mapping still does not appear to be utilised as much as

it could be and this is a primary role of SFCC. All data storage-related objectives were discussed as part of item 7 below.

6. **SFCC electrofishing training review**

Committee reviewed the paper circulated prior to the meeting which set out the background and purpose of reviewing the SFCC electrofishing training system. The document also noted some concerns raised by SFCC members and proposed 5 different solutions for consideration. The following actions were agreed:

ACTION: Increase expiry date on Team Leader and Team Leader Refresher certificates from 3 to 5 years. To meet SFCC protocols candidates require a current certificate.

ACTION: SD to re-issue certificates for those who passed within 5 years where contact details are available. Info to be added to SFCC website.

Committee agreed to introduce written guidelines on the pathway for candidates to progress from the intro level (or suitable equivalent from UK or abroad) to the team leader level. These guidelines will include a requirement that at least 20 days of electrofishing are undertaken after passing the introductory course and before the Team Leader course. These 20 days should, where possible include experience in the full range of electrofishing team roles and should include experience of quantitative sampling and habitat survey methods. Before signing up for the Team Leader course, candidates should have a qualified Team Leader (or suitable equivalent level from elsewhere in the UK or abroad) vouch for their experience. This approval should be submitted to SFCC prior to signing up for attendance on the Team leader course. However, if it is not possible to gain approval in this manner then consideration will be given to the experience set out by the candidate.

ACTION: SFCC to define what “equivalent qualification” means.

ACTION: SD to contact Inverness College to discuss process.

ACTION: SD to update SFCC website, course flyers and manuals to be updated.

ACTION: SD, JG to complete Intro and Team Leader manual revision ASAP and send to Jamie, Bob and Rowan.

ACTION: Intro and Team Leader test questions also to be reviewed.

Electrofishing licensing requirements

Fisheries Management Scotland are currently working with Marine Scotland to undertake a review of the licensing of illegal fishing methods in Scotland. SFCC members have ambitions to ensure that there is a consistent approach to training and competency across Scotland, accepting that there are different means of achieving this consistent approach. Ideally SFCC training (or equivalent) would be a pre-requisite for anyone wishing to electrofish in Scotland.

SDr noted that progress on this question could be a long way off. Committee noted the potential for fish welfare issues where personnel have no training, especially related to broodstock collection. SDr concluded that this issue is currently of lower priority than gaining funding for National Electrofishing Programme for Scotland year 2, Fisheries Management Planning, developing data storage infrastructure and developing a stocking policy.

7. **Electrofishing data storage**

Committee reviewed a paper circulated prior to the meeting containing the following key points:

- The database is running well and will continue to be supported by our developer.
- However, since the takeover by Egton in 2017 there has been some general concern around the support provided by our developer.
- Specific concern around options for adding further functionality to the database.
- Egton will now no longer provide a service to add additional functionality.

Members then took the opportunity to consider the 5 following options:

1. Continue with current arrangements as they are.
2. Explore the use of FishObs Data Processing Utility with MSS. In this scenario SFCC members would use currently available technology as trialled for smolt data collection in 2017 and 2018. Site upload, data import and export would need to be carried out by MSS staff with significant resource implications*.
3. Scope requirements and assess the potential of a cloud-based version of FishObs to be made accessible to SFCC members. SFCC have set aside up to £10,000 in their 2019-2020 budget for this type of scoping/development*.
4. Explore whether Egton can migrate our system to a new infrastructure, thus permitting the option of further development in the future*.
5. Scope and explore data storage solutions with alternative (external) providers*.

*In any scenario the existing SFCC database service would be maintained in parallel to any new developments to provide members with continued support and ample time to migrate. Regardless of the options explored, the current SFCC database solution would be maintained and funded by SFCC until at least October 2020.

ACTION: SFCC/MSS to further consider options 2 and 3 during 2019.

SDr noted that FishObs is meeting MS's needs very well at present and provides an opportunity for delivering user friendly data storage for many types of data. Any opening up of access to SFCC members would need to meet members' needs and not impact on MS needs.

Committee discussed the long-term prospect of SFCC storing data in Fish Obs and discussed a range of issues that might arise from transferring over to Fish Obs in future. Unfortunately due to a lack of IT staff resource availability (currently focused on delivering a new salmon catch database), it will be later in 2019 before any scoping can be considered. Iain Malcolm also provided a written note before the meeting adding that FishObs can store smolt data, sweep netting data and scale reading data with associated images.

SDr mentioned that it is more likely than not that the National Electrofishing Programme will be funded again this year. Participating organisations may be given the option to enter data in to the SFCC database or Fish Obs.

8. **2019 Biologists' Meeting**

Committee reviewed the meeting and commended the conference and dinner venue.

Attendance from Marine Scotland staff was down on the previous year and there is a need to encourage higher attendance. There was an accidental break-down in communication in the minutes leading up to the start of the Monday morning member's update session.

ACTION: Require speakers to submit talks in advance of the meeting in future.

9. **AOB**

The June meeting will no longer be held on June 12th.

ACTION: SD to circulate a doodle poll.

Marine Scotland Stocking Policy Review

SDr drew attention to the draft NASCO 5-year implementation plan for the period 2019-2024, which has been published. The draft will be reviewed by November 1st and within the plan is a commitment to review stocking policy by the 2020 season.

SDr explained that, whilst the stocking of wild Atlantic salmon, either as fertilised eggs or juvenile fish, is a legitimate fisheries management technique in some circumstances, there is a significant weight of peer reviewed scientific evidence, not confined to research conducted by Marine Scotland Science (MSS), which suggests that there are only a limited number of situations where hatchery and stocking strategies may benefit individual wild salmon populations.

In situations where stocking offers the best option for delivering benefits for a wild Atlantic salmon population, these are best delivered through the adoption of an appropriate stocking practice which minimises the risks of genetic damage to the local wild Atlantic salmon stock. Failure to adhere to best practice can weaken a wild Atlantic salmon population by reducing its ability to adapt to environmental challenges.

For example, Marine Scotland does not currently support the stocking of **farmed** progeny. We define farmed progeny as second generation and beyond progeny. Marine Scotland's Freshwater Licensing Team would also not currently license the introduction of any **smolts**.

Marine Scotland, SNH and SEPA experts have made rapid progress with the development of an updated stocking policy and we hope to share a draft with FMS in May 2019.