

# Fisheries Management Scotland

## Meeting of Directors – Minutes

### 24 March 2022

By Videoconference

#### Present

Richard Sankey (Chairman)

Alison Baker

Roger Brook

Lorraine Hawkins

Roger Knight (*for Alexander Scott*)

Alasdair Laing

Peter Landale

Alexa MacAuslan

Jamie Ribbens

David Summers

#### Apologies for absence

Alexander Scott

Hugh Younger

#### In attendance

Alan Wells

Brian Davidson

#### 1. Apologies for absence and welcome to new directors

Apologies were received from Alexander Scott and Hugh Younger. The Chairman welcomed Roger Knight, who attended in place of Alexander Scott.

#### 2. Actions arising from the September Board meeting

The majority of actions had been discharged or discussed later in the agenda. BD provided an update on Action 2.1 – health and safety training. All staff have now satisfactorily completed an online certificated health & safety module. It was agreed it would be useful to review the overall health and safety policy and associated risk assessments. It was agreed to undertake an initial in-house review and then consider whether additional professional input was necessary. **ACTION: BD/AW**

#### 3. Board directorships & succession planning

Following an invitation for nominations, two nominations were received. The election process will be taken forward following the conference. **ACTION: BD/AW**

BD summarised a paper which set out the current terms of office for the directors and some of the matters to consider in relation to a systematic process for succession planning. This included:

- An assessment of skills and experience required to manage the organisation at board/strategic level and to what degree the current board holds these skills;
- Identification of skills gaps through the development of a skills register;
- As part of a skills audit, the Board should identify what skills and experience can be sourced from within the membership network and how external skills might be brought into the organisation, if deemed desirable (which will require changes to the constitution).
- Priority should be given to a process for identifying a future Chairman, in light of the need for the current holder to retire at the 2024 AGM

The Board agreed that these are matters of priority and appropriate process should be developed. It was also agreed that a dialogue with the membership should begin about the need for new directors with the right skills and experience. This would be taken forward,

including the use of opportunities such as regional members meetings to explore this further. **ACTION: AW/BD/RS**

#### **4. Policy updates**

AW provided an update on items 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, 4.6 and 4.7 and BD updated on item 4.5

##### **4.1. Wild Salmon Strategy**

It has been recognised by Government that joint delivery of the strategy is essential, and a range of discussions have been taking place within Government and Agencies on this principle. AW has been pressing the importance of ensuring that any actions which fall to the FMS network for delivery are supported, not just in terms of resources, but also through appropriate regulation from the relevant agencies. Marine Scotland have accepted, given the wild salmon crisis, that progress can happen in advance of the completion of the implementation plan. The Board discussed the strategy and concluded that positive progress is underway. However, it was agreed that Fisheries Management Scotland should continue to work to ensure this momentum continues.

##### **4.2. Predation**

NatureScot are looking at a new methodology for counting fish-eating birds on rivers in Scotland and have funded a pilot study on the Conon, Spey and Forth/Teith. Separately, a review of the licensing system will be underway soon through a specific predation group to be led by Government – Fisheries Management Scotland will be involved in this review.

Concerns continue about seals penetrating far into rivers and work is underway with the River Dee to highlight the issues raised by this problem. FMS and the River Dee wrote jointly to the Cabinet Secretary to raise this issue and in response the Minister will visit the Dee in early April to see the situation. Both AW and Roger Knight (Spey) have been working with the Government licensing team to address issues with the application process for the seal licensing system. The process is now focussed on a method statement, which allows managers to clearly set out the circumstances where management action might be taken. Support has been provided by AW and RK to members in relation to applications.

A web-based application which allows anglers, ghillies, proprietors and managers to record seal sightings within river has also been launched by FMS – data such as this will help support the licensing process. The app has been distributed to all DSFBs and Trusts.

##### **4.3. Aquaculture**

Charlotte Middleton worked with FMS members in the aquaculture zone to develop the response to the SEPA consultation on the sea lice risk assessment framework. Whilst the principles in the consultation are welcomed, there are a number of areas where FMS feel SEPA need to go further and faster.

Applications have now closed for the second year of the Wild Salmonid Support Fund and Foundation Scotland are now reviewing the applications – it is understood that demand for the funding is high.

Marine receivers are now being deployed for the second year of the West Coast Tracking Project, and salmon from 10 rivers will be tagged this year. This has already provided important information on transit times through sea lochs and sounds which is directly relevant to the proposed sea lice risk assessment framework.

Professor Griggs has now published an independent Review of the Aquaculture Regulatory Process in Scotland. FMS wrote to the Cabinet Secretary, to emphasise the importance of the reports of the two Parliamentary Inquiries and the Salmon Interactions Working Group. AW will meet the Cabinet Secretary to discuss these issues in late March.

#### **4.4. Beavers**

AW has been contributing to the Scottish Beaver Strategy from a fish conservation and fisheries perspective. The process has been frustrating and there is a strong sense that it is being rushed, following the announcement by the Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy and Biodiversity that beavers could be translocated out with their current range. At the recent series of meetings, AW presented a range of issues relating to beaver-salmonid interactions and impacts, and these issues appeared to be recognised. The working group are now in the final stages of making recommendations for inclusion in the management and mitigation section of the report, where issues around fish and fisheries will be covered.

AB echoed these concerns with issues with beavers occurring in the Forth catchment and the DSFB was not consulted by NatureScot. It would appear that the process is also being rushed through locally, with no information forthcoming on management or mitigation measures. The Board remain disappointed with the approach of Scottish Government and NatureScot and AW will continue to press hard the need for management and mitigation for fish and fisheries, and crucially funding for this work, to be a key part of the strategy.

#### **4.5. Enforcement**

A paper outlining a proposal for FMS to support a project to develop a series of training films was discussed. The original basis for this project was funding received by FMS from the Forth DSFB. To look at expanding the scope and budget for this work, BD invited IFM Scottish Branch to participate and they have agreed to support the project with a similar amount. The Board agreed that this was a worthwhile project for FMS to support and subject to there being funds available, this should be taken forward. The Board also felt that it would be appropriate to invite Scottish Government to support the work, given the shared objectives on enforcement training. BD will provide further information and seek formal approval from the Board for specific expenditure later in the project and will also explore with Scottish Government the potential for funding support. **ACTION: BD**

BD also reported that a training day for Procurator Fiscals and Police Scotland has been set for 29 June. This will be held at the Tay DSFB office and Marine Scotland will also be present. The programme is presently being assembled in conjunction with the FMS enforcement committee.

#### **4.6. SEPA**

Work to prioritise key areas for action with SEPA is continuing. These priorities include the process for licensing in-river works. SEPA is currently reviewing fish protection licence conditions and a document summarising their approach will be discussed with them soon, with input from FMS members who have expertise in this area. Both AB and DS noted interest in participating in these discussions, and this will be taken forward. **ACTION: AW**

SEPA have opened a consultation on disproportionate cost and FMS provided some input to this approach in advance of the consultation going live. A response to the consultation will be developed over the next few weeks. **ACTION: AW**

Concerns about water scarcity continue to be raised with SEPA and a meeting is being organised to discuss this further with SEPA. SEPA are currently prioritising their resources on the hydropower review and removal of fish barriers – AW is finding out more about this process, with a view to FMS getting further engaged in both areas. It was noted that SEPA had been in touch with some stakeholders about the hydropower review, with some positive and encouraging initial discussions about improving flows and fish passage. However, there was less engagement in other areas. To help address such issues and achieve consistency, it was agreed that FMS should co-ordinate members discussion on the review through the newly formed Hydro Power Committee. **ACTION: AW**

#### **4.7. Projects and funding**

AW reported that funding to support the third year of the aquaculture interactions manager post will be received soon. Funding is also anticipated from Crown Estate Scotland and Marine Scotland to continue the support for members in monitoring sea lice on sea trout.

Marine Scotland Science have announced that, due to capacity issues, the National Electrofishing Programme for Scotland (NEPS) will not proceed this year. It was recognised that this is very disappointing, as it is an important project which supports FMS members and was clearly identified as a priority in the Wild Salmon Strategy. There was also concern about the stop-start nature of the project and how this decision will interrupt the continuity of critical data gathered through this project.

AW has been exploring with Marine Scotland the possibility of support for other priority work, and this includes the possibility of an expanded adult sampling project, development of on-line fisheries management plans and further development of the pressures tool. AW will provide an update as this progresses. **ACTION: AW**

The Board welcomed the proposal to look at other project support areas, such as the adult sampling project, however there remains concern about how low numbers of adult fish in some areas may make this project untenable for some.

## **5. Communications**

### **5.1. Annual conference – 31 March 2022**

BD advised that well over 100 delegates had registered from within our network and external organisations. The programme has been published on the website and the event will include a diverse range of contributors in all 3 sessions, including an international perspective. Session 3 will be the launch of the FMS film, *Our Wild Salmon*. Promotion of the event is still underway and further registrations are expected prior to close of registration.

## **5.2. Annual Review**

BD reported that following a survey of members, the consensus was in favour of a digital copy rather than a printed version. However, following discussion, the Board recognised the strong demand in some areas for hard copies, particularly where there is an organised fishing infrastructure with ghillies, beat huts and easy means of disseminating the review. The overall approach of the review was discussed, and for the future it may be useful to reconsider how relevant the catch data is, particularly as it is now much closer to the publication of the official catch statistics than was previously the case. The Board agreed that it is an excellent resource and PL mooted the potential to bring content of future reviews into a film. It was agreed to undertake a limited print run for those that would like hard copies and also use a digital copy as in previous years for those that would prefer that approach. **ACTION: AW/BD**

## **6. Missing Salmon Alliance**

AW and PL provided an update on the alliance. The initiative is proving to be very positive close collaboration between all member organisations is highly beneficial. FMS is playing a strong part in the process - AW is the chair of the advocacy group, and this is enabling the development of clear and consistent policy positions across a number of key areas. BD represents FMS on the communications group, and both groups now have strategies to help deliver clear objectives.

PL outlined the recent Alliance fundraising event in London and the target for this year's funding. The FMS film was used to help support fundraising efforts and was received very positively. Work will be undertaken to further develop our funding story to encourage support. PL felt that the time is now right for the alliance to enter the wider biodiversity and climate space to advocate for salmon and FMS is very well placed to help deliver this as an alliance partner. The forthcoming *Salmon School at Balmoral* will help to continue the narrative and publicity and FMS will help promote this.

## **7. Staffing – SFCC recruitment update**

AW reported that the interview panel has now met to assess three candidates for the post of SFCC manager, and an offer of employment has been made to the successful candidate. Once accepted, the Board will be informed. The Board took the opportunity to recognise Sean Dugan's significant contribution to the SFCC and wished him well in his new position at Kyle Fisheries.

## **8. Scottish Angling National Development Structure (SANDS)**

AW reported that a question about progress with SANDS had been raised at the last meeting. A meeting was held between Countryside Learning Scotland, AW, AB, DS and LH to discuss progress and next steps. It was recognised that the pandemic has caused challenges to delivery of the project, but it was agreed to try and move it forward through reporting progress and set out future actions and objectives. It was also agreed that a priority should be to bring in more resources to support local delivery. **ACTION: AW**

**9. AOB**

LH felt there is a need to articulate the key 'asks' for Scottish Government to help address the wild salmon crisis. This could help other stakeholders to support approaches to Government if there was clarity and consistency on the key messages. There was some discussion on whether FMS can and should take a more 'campaigning' type approach. The Board noted that campaigns can be very different depending on the way they are delivered and FMS exists to support its members. It was agreed that there should be some further discussion about the most effective ways to achieve effective advocacy. **ACTION: AW/LH**

AB asked whether there was any information about the year of the next fisheries revaluation. It was confirmed that this will happen in 2023.

**10. 2022 meetings**

23 June

15 September

AGM 3 November