

Minutes

1. Welcome and apologies for absence

In attendance:

Marcus Walters – Deveron, Bogie & Isla Rivers Charitable Trust (Chair)
Alan Wells – Fisheries Management Scotland
Antje Branding – Marine Scotland
Joanna Girvan – Forth Rivers Trust
John Armstrong – Marine Scotland Science
Leanne Munro – Scottish Fisheries Coordination Centre/Kyle of Sutherland Fisheries Trust
Rowan McCleary – Galloway Fisheries Trust
Sean Robertson – Scottish Fisheries Coordination Centre

Apologies

Kjersti Birkland – SEPA
James Hunt – The Tweed Foundation

Sean Robertson was welcomed onto the committee in his new role as SFCC Manager.

2. Minutes of 1 December meeting, review of action points and matters arising

2.1. Management Committee 1st December 2021

The majority of actions had been discharged or discussed later in the agenda. A paper on Invertebrate Analysis Options was circulated before the meeting. SFCC has released the first version of the rapid invertebrate monitoring protocol, created by Buglife Scotland. Following SR's discussions with Craig Macadam, it has been established that there is not a central database for invertebrate data like there is for SFCC's electrofishing data.

There was discussion about what invertebrate data is currently collected by MSS, and if it is compatible with FishObs or uses another database. It was also noted that SEPA undertake extensive invertebrate surveys and should be fully involved when discussing options for data storage. Marine Scotland Science would also be consulted with regard to the capabilities of FishObs, and whether it can store invertebrate data.

ACTION: SR to contact Iain Malcolm and Kjersti Birkland to explore potential directions for storage of invertebrate data.

Some updates were given on the status of electrofishing courses with the SQA. Some modules came under the Rural Land use and Management SVQ, which finished in April 2020. Other aspects may not have been current since 2013.

ACTION: LM/SR to work with the electrofishing trainers to set out the process of who is speaking to the SQA about the SVQ accreditation for the electrofishing training.

The provision of extra training for members to create Survey123 apps was discussed. ESRI provide excellent courses which provide a good foundation to use the software. Some basic tutorial videos can be created by us to go over aspects of using Survey123, creating a form, exporting data etc. A concern raised by providing this level of training was that it may discourage members from using the “toolbox” of apps provided by SFCC and opt to using their own and risk losing the standardisation of collected data. A paper form of the Survey123 tools could be created to avoid taking technology out for members who are more comfortable using paper forms in the field. Data can be input to Survey123 back in the office to store it centrally.

2.2. Members meeting 23rd February 2022

At the members meeting in February it was raised that there does not seem to be a formal process for inviting new members onto the SFCC management committee. Additionally, the length of time that people sit on the committee was raised. There is no limit as to how long someone can be on the committee for, and for further discussion was if there should be limits on how long members can serve on the management committee and if there should be a system for rotation in place. This was discussed further later in the agenda.

3. Report from Leanne Munro (January – May)

Leanne shared a PowerPoint outlining her activities with SFCC since January. MW proposed that the current secondment arrangements were extended to keep Leanne on for 2 days a week until the end of September. The Kyle of Sutherland DSFB will employ her the remaining 3 days a week. Leanne has done exceptionally well in the role so far and has kept things running when Sean Dugan departed. She would also be able to provide assistance to SR as he settles in the role of SFCC Manager. Committee agreed to extend Leanne’s employment.

4. Feedback on 2022 Biologists’ Meeting and proposal for 2023

Sean Dugan received very positive feedback about the 2022 meeting. It was SFCC’s highest Marine Scotland Freshwater Laboratory staff turnout and there were also several SEPA staff in attendance which was appreciated post cyber-attack. The Trusts five-minute slots were appreciated as were the very high profile speakers from overseas.

Some discussion was had about returning the Biologist's conference to a face-to-face meeting or a hybrid approach. It was generally agreed that a return to a face-to-face conference would be ideal, but other options should be explored. The facilities at Faskally House can only accommodate a couple of people from each Trust. A different venue may allow for more people to attend in person. It was noted that a hybrid approach may limit opportunities for some to attend in person, but it was also recognised that the hybrid approach makes attendance easier for Trusts further away, and for overseas speakers. JA noted it may be informative to know how many people would attend in person before deciding on a format.

ACTION: SR to consider venue location and format for the next biologist's conference and send a survey round to ask people if they would prefer a face-to-face or a hybrid meeting.

5. SFCC year-end financial report

It was agreed previously by the management committee that SFCC would spend £15k of the reserves. In total, £14,750 was spent. Closing back balance 30th April £58,627.45. SFCC's reserve is held separately from FMS.

6. Process for electing new management member

A discussion was had about the formal process for electing new members of the management committee. An email should be sent round the membership for candidates to be nominated, and this could be voted on by the membership using Microsoft forms.

ACTION: SR/MW/AW to review and if necessary, amend the terms of reference to ensure it remains fit for purpose.

7. Review of electrofishing database options

Management committee discussed the electrofishing database options circulated in a paper in more detail. A working group would help to steer the direction of travel. James Hunt and Marcus Walters have expressed interest in being on a working group, and committee noted that it would be important to seek the input of Iain Malcolm and SEPA.

The need to be clear on the purpose of the group was noted. This would require a formal Terms of Reference and further discussion about participants.

ACTION: SR/MW to draft a brief outline and ToR setting out what should be achieved by the electrofishing working group.

Some members had concerns that if data was stored in FishObs it may then be subject to FOI, which could impact making commercial use of EF data. JA noted that it would be worth looking at the actual financial contributions of selling EF data vs maintaining the costs of a database. JG noted that there was some added value in that Trusts being asked for data can sometimes draw attention to new developments which the Trust/DSFB may not have previously been consulted on. No reply from the contact in the EA has been received.

8. Publication/Distribution of resources (see paper)

8.1. Protocol documents and online training materials – e.g., scale reading course, invertebrate course etc.

Various options to store, and make available, training materials and protocols were outlined in an options paper and discussed. The use of the FMS SharePoint system was identified and agreed as a preferred option, as it is secure and admin for SFCC staff would be minimal. This system allows access to these materials to be set by SFCC, thereby allowing members exclusive access.

8.2. SharePoint for SFCC management committee

Leanne explained that a SharePoint site could also be used to share meeting papers and other information with committee members.

ACTION: SR/LM to create a SharePoint site for sharing training materials within SFCC, and to use SharePoint for Management Committee documents.

9. Eel monitoring (relationship between SFCC/IFM)

LM & SR had a recent meeting with Jack Wooton to discuss progress on the development of eel sampling protocols. A Survey123 app is ready to go, but could be complimented with a paper form as some members feel more comfortable with this method of recording data, which is also not reliant on a phone or tablet having enough power. Jack is also developing training material for the Institute of Fisheries Management. It was proposed to have a jointly hosted training event to debut the eel sampling protocol alongside training developed for IFM. It was felt that this approach worked well for the Rapid Invertebrate Sampling Protocol. Any joint training course should be offered at a cost neutral price.

ACTION: SR to liaise with Keith Williams to see if IFM would be agreeable to collaborating on an eel sampling training event.

10. AOB

AB noted that the Wild salmon strategy implementation plan represents a good opportunity to promote the range of work being done at SFCC which complements this important workstream. The implementation plan will be published at the end of the year.

JA noted that the implementation plan is a logical focus/theme for the Biologists' Meeting in February.

Remaining meetings in 2022 are the 14th of September and 30th of November.

ACTION: SR to send out meeting invites for September and November meetings.

11:50 meeting close