

Fisheries Management Scotland

Meeting of Directors – Minutes

23 June 2022

By Videoconference

Present

Richard Sankey (Chairman)
Alison Baker
Roger Brook
Lorraine Hawkins
Alasdair Laing
Peter Landale

Alexa MacAuslan
Jamie Ribbens
Alexander Scott
David Summers
Hugh Younger

In attendance

Alan Wells
Brian Davidson
Sean Robertson

1. Apologies for absence and welcome to new directors

No apologies for absence were received. The Chairman welcomed Sean Robertson, SFCC Manager to the meeting.

2. Declaration of Interests

The register of interest was circulated prior to the meeting. No amendments were proposed and no interests were declared in relation the proposed business of this meeting.

3. Actions arising from the March Board meeting

The majority of actions had been delivered or discussed later in the agenda. The following updates were provided on specific action points:

- **Health and safety training** BD advised that the policy has been reviewed and his view was that there is no need for any external input at this stage, given the activities of staff haven't changed significantly - the key risks are covered in the policy and this is made available to all staff. In addition to this, specific risk assessments have been developed to deal with certain situations (i.e. recent field visits for NASCO, COVID etc), and all home-working assessments have all been carried out. AB queried whether activity in or around fish farms was covered (in relation to the Aquaculture Interactions Manager role). BD confirmed this was the case – the policy has specific provisions relating to working around water. In addition, individual fish farm companies require compliance with their own policies prior to any visits. A number of follow-up actions were agreed:
 - To establish which staff are competent in first aid and address any gaps in training: **ACTION: BD/AW**
 - DS suggested that the Institute of Occupational Safety & Health resources provide a useful overview of things to consider. This would be followed up. **ACTION: BD/AW**
 - JR suggested convening an annual staff H&S meeting to discuss and report any issues and review any reporting processes. This would be followed up. **ACTION: BD/AW**
- **Funding support for training films** BD confirmed that a meeting with Marine Scotland has been scheduled and he will report back on the discussions. **ACTION: BD**

- **Develop a response to the SEPA consultation on disproportionate cost** – AW has completed this, in consultation with members. A copy is available on the Board SharePoint site.
- **Investigate enhanced funding support to improve local delivery of SANDS** – AW has been exploring options. It was recognised that funding opportunities are limited, but this will continue to be explored with officials.

4. Board directorships & succession planning

The Board previously discussed the need to have a strategy to consider what skills and experience we need at Board level to manage the organisation. This includes the process by which new directors are brought on, avoidance of gaps on the board and identification of clear succession arrangements for directors and the position of Chair, including what the role entails. A short discussion paper was prepared to highlight some of the key issues.

Following discussion, it was agreed to form a small sub-group comprising Sandy Scott, Alison Baker and Alexa MacAuslan to take this forward, with support as appropriate from staff. The paper provided in advance of the meeting outlined the key points for the group to consider, and whilst the initial think was that group should act as a nominations committee, it will be necessary to consider some of the broader constitutional issues that will require change to deliver what we would like to see. **ACTION: SS/AB/AM** with support from **AW/BD**

5. Advocacy in light of the wild salmon crisis and concerns raised

5.1 Call to action

The call to action was launched via a news release in the context of the recently announced lowest catch of salmon and sea trout on record. The news release content was picked up and published by several media outlets. This was complemented by good engagement on social media. It was recognised that centrally driven initiatives like this need equivalent ‘ground-up’ activity from members and this is something that needs to be encouraged with the membership.

5.2 Wild Salmon Strategy Implementation Plan

Two meetings have taken place and the process of developing the Implementation Plan for the strategy is underway. This will be consulted on before the end of the year. The priority for Fisheries Management Scotland is to ensure that the plan objectives are ambitious, clear, and measurable. A key aspiration is that the strategy should challenge a wide range of sectors to go beyond their statutory obligations to achieve better outcomes for wild salmon.

5.3 Engagement with SEPA on regulatory issues

In light of ongoing issues with in-river works, AW, and several river managers met with SEPA to discuss licensing of in-river working and consultation/engagement with DSFBs as part of this process. This, and subsequent meetings will help inform SEPA’s current review of this aspect of regulation.

AW and DS met SEPA to discuss the water scarcity consultation, and this was an opportunity to highlight some gaps in the water scarcity process. A further meeting is to be planned to follow this up.

There was some discussion about alternative approaches to seek more rigorous regulation of the water environment, in light of local experiences across Scotland about compliance with the regulations governing water quality. AB had also attended a recent SEPA Board meeting, which was an interesting process, however there was little feedback from the meeting. DS suggested that it could be useful to try and highlight some of the local issues first hand, such as hydro

impacts on fish, and this might foster a better understanding and facilitate action in certain areas.

AW updated the Board on the work of the Fisheries Management Scotland hydro committee. At a recent meeting SEPA provided an update on their hydro review process, and further engagement with fisheries managers on this process is now underway.

6. Policy updates

6.1 SFCC

Following Sean Dugan leaving SFCC, continuity with training provision has been possible thanks to the secondment of Leanne Munro. Work on the salmon pressures tool is now being finalised with Marine Scotland. Two national projects, the adult salmon sampling programme and fisheries management planning are underway and an app, developed by SFCC, will support the former. Further areas of work include developing guidance on drone use and improving the security and useability of the electrofishing database. A working group has been established to oversee the process of the latter, in conjunction with Marine Scotland.

6.2 Aquaculture

The Scottish Government has established the Scottish Aquaculture Council, which Fisheries Management Scotland have been invited to join. This group will advise Scottish Ministers on the development of the new regulatory system, in line with the Bute House commitments. The consultation on the sea lice risk assessment framework closed in March and work on the next phase has started. Three workshops on specific elements of the framework are scheduled in late June. CM continues to support members in ensuring Environmental Management Plans (EMPs), and associated wild fish monitoring, are fit for purpose and implemented robustly. This has included specific engagement with Marine Scotland and local authorities, and we continue to support members engaged in EMP discussions ahead of any new regulatory framework for fish farming in Scotland. Positive and ongoing engagement is also underway with Crown Estate Scotland (CES) in terms of supporting the programme for monitoring wild fish.

6.3 Beavers

Fisheries Management Scotland continues to contribute to the development of the Scottish Beaver Strategy. The process, which has been time consuming and challenging, is now almost complete, with publication expected in July. Fisheries Management Scotland have been working to raise awareness of current impacts on wild salmon in Tayside, and to ensure that the management framework allows these impacts to be addressed. We, alongside a range of stakeholders, continue to press the case that this work to manage and mitigate beaver impacts must be funded in full. A working group will oversee implementation of the strategy and Fisheries Management Scotland will input to this process.

6.4 Enforcement

In partnership with the Tay and Spey DSFBs, an event has been organised to provide training on fish crime to Police Scotland, the Crown Office Procurator Fiscal Service and Marine Scotland. As well as practical training, this event will an opportunity to screen the enforcement film and to highlight the important role of enforcement in the implementation of the Wild Salmon Strategy. The event will also consider broader environmental crime and how the salmon legislation provides protection to fish habitat.

BD and AW met with Police Scotland recently to discuss the film series and they have agreed to promote it through various channels, including the partnership Against Wildlife Crime. Further work included contributing to a specific Police Scotland news release highlighting the importance of combatting fish crime and this was released by Police Scotland in June.

In partnership with IFM, Fisheries Management Scotland have co-ordinated four online water bailiff examinations during 2022, with at least one further one planned.

Recent parliamentary questions on the use of onshore gill nets were highlighted. These were highlighted to Scottish Government officials as part the enforcement discussions within the Wild Salmon Strategy Implementation Plan.

6.5 Projects and funding

Marine Scotland have now confirmed that £500k grant funding will support the collection of data for the adult salmon sampling programme and to support the fisheries management planning process. The latter project will connect local plans with the salmon pressures tool. The Board were pleased to see support announced for this important work.

6.6 Predation

As highlighted in the Wild Salmon Strategy, the Scottish Government committed to a review of fish-eating bird policy, which will inform the proposed wider review of the species licensing system. The first meeting of this group has now been held and AW, LH, Roger Knight and Jamie Stewart contributed to this discussion. We are seeking to achieve a better balance in consideration of the conservation status of predator and prey species.

Fisheries Management Scotland have engaged with Marine Scotland on measures to protect salmon from predation by seals, including through licensed control. Following changes to the legislation at the end of the last Parliament, the system is now focused on the conservation of salmon, as opposed to the protection of fisheries. In most cases, applications for licenses were refused, but the process has been inconsistent and we are exploring options for appeal with applicants. The board agreed that more effective means to protect salmon from predation are crucial and agreed that this was an important element of the Wild Salmon Strategy Implementation Plan.

7. Communications

7.1 Members meetings

3 Regional face to face members meetings are planned for the summer, in Inverness, Montrose and Peebles. It is also proposed to hold two online meetings to reach people unable to get to the face-to-face meetings.

7.2 2023 Annual Review

The Board recognised that one of the key features of the review is the catch reports, and the early sight of catch trends for the previous year prior to the official data. However, it was accepted that a weakness is the quality and consistency of the data. Some of the data is partial/provisional and the work involved in this element of the review is substantial. The Board discussed a number of options, including the removal of the catch section and re-presenting the official data with a narrative, when it is published. This would be discussed further at the next meeting with the aim of having a clear plan before the end of the current year. **ACTION: AW/BD**

8. Missing Salmon Alliance

Fisheries Management Scotland continue to contribute to the work of the Missing Salmon Alliance. AW chairs the advocacy workstream and BD is an active member of the communications group. Work is underway to review the overall strategy to ensure that the members of the alliance focus on key, priority outputs and actions. Building on the heightened awareness of the MSA through COP26 and the Salmon School art installation, PL is leading a workstream designed to explore means by which investment in the restoration of biodiversity at a river catchment scale can be realised. Fisheries Management Scotland members are uniquely placed to deliver such restoration work and would be an ideal focus for such investment. The Board supported this initiative and asked that PL and AW keep the Board apprised of developments. **ACTION: PL/AW**

9. Staffing

It was recognised that due to Mary Nicholson retiring from the Board, another director was required to provide oversight and support on the staff appraisal process. LH agreed to lead this process, with support from RS and PL. **ACTION: AW/LH/RS/PL**

10. AOB

AB raised a point about the salmon fishings revaluation process for 2023. Following discussion with the Scottish Assessors Association (SAA), it was apparent that the significance of newly opened up fish habitat is not being factored into the valuations applied to fisheries. The SAA will be discussing this further with Marine Scotland.

11. 2022 meetings

15 September

AGM 3 November