

# Fisheries Management Scotland

## Meeting of Directors - Minutes

Wednesday 20 September 2023



### By Videoconference

#### Present

Richard Sankey

Jamie Stewart

Jamie Ribbens

Melanie Smith

Alasdair Laing

Alexa MacAuslan

Lorraine Hawkins

Alison Baker

David Summers

Alexander Scott

#### In attendance

Alan Wells

Brian Davidson

Charlotte Middleton

Jenny McNeill

Paul Sizeland

#### 1. Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Peter Landale, Roger Brook and Sean Robertson.

#### 2. Declaration of interests

BD updated the register of interests prior to the meeting to incorporate recent changes.

#### 3. Actions arising from June Board meeting

All actions from the previous board meeting were reported as complete.

#### 4. Financial and AGM

##### 4.1. Monthly reports

The latest financial reports were circulated to the Board prior to the meeting and no comments were raised.

##### 4.2. Draft annual accounts to March 2023

The draft annual accounts to March 2023 were circulated prior to the Board meeting. The Board discussed some presentational aspects of the accounts and it was agreed that clarification on some aspects would be sought from the accountants before they are presented to the members at the AGM. Whilst the accounts reported a loss for the year, overall, the financial position is noted as secure with a healthy cash-at-bank position and reserve. **ACTION BD**

##### 4.3. Draft 2024 budget and member subscription

The draft 2024 budget was circulated prior to the Board meeting. The chairman gave an overview, highlighting where savings can be made in the next financial year across a number of items. The Board recommended a 5% increase in member subscriptions for the next financial year, to be agreed at the AGM in November.

JS queried an item related to the legal fees, which were higher last year. This was due to a delay in invoicing, resulting in two charges in the same financial year. There were no further comments.

#### **4.4. Proposed changes to constitution for approval at AGM**

A short paper was circulated prior to the Board meeting which summarised the recommendations of the Directorships and Succession Planning Group. The recommendations were discussed with members at the latest round of members' meetings over the summer and had been well received.

The Board discussed the various recommendations. This included retention of the current balance between Boards and Trusts as elected members to the Board, but with additional flexibility in the appointment process, including one appointee from outside the membership. AW will produce a paper setting out a process for external appointees to the board, including eligibility criteria, and this will be further discussed by the Directorships and Succession Planning Group. The Board also welcomed the idea of a director representing an early career start and this would be considered as part of any changes to the rules. **ACTION AW**

## **5. Policy Updates**

### **5.1. Update on current projects and funding**

AW highlighted the hard work of the Fisheries Management Scotland team over the past few months, including securing funding for various projects, which were discussed in more detail further in the agenda, as well as working across a number of challenging policy areas. Two further funding bids have been submitted in recent weeks, led by BD and SR, to secure equipment to help deliver electrofishing programmes and help manage local seal and salmon interactions on a non-lethal basis. It is hoped that the results of these bids will be known in the coming weeks.

The National Electrofishing Programme for Scotland (NEPS) was successfully funded at short notice earlier in 2023, which despite some challenges in terms of weather conditions, FMS members have made great progress on in a limited timescale. The NEPS team has been fully briefed on any issues related to the delivery of the programme.

The Adult Salmon Sampling Project (ASSESS) project funding was also received at short notice this year, and due to a reduced budget is being taken forward by a small number of FMS members.

### **5.2. Nature Finance Strategy**

PS updated the Board on the progress of the Facility for Investment Ready Nature Scotland (FIRNS) bid, a joint bid to the National Lottery Heritage Fund and Nature Scot. The bid was successfully secured, allowing FMS to begin to work with project partners – NatureScot, Crown Estate and Scottish Government Marine Directorate - as well as FMS members and external consultants, to develop a financing framework to take the

project forward. Work on the project will begin soon, with the aim to complete by mid-March 2024.

The Board discussed a strategy prepared by PS to support FMS members in securing private finance to support efforts to protect and restore river catchments. With this in mind, content will be developed for the FMS website, giving a brief and direct explanation of the nature of this work. **ACTION PS**

### **5.3. Missing Salmon Alliance update**

AW provided an update on the support the MSA have provided to FMS, including developing a closer working relationship with the partners. In particular, close working ties are being developed with the Rivers Trust, which is providing a number of mutual benefits for both organisations and the respective memberships.

AW provided an update on a new communication initiative which is being developed to support efforts to secure new funding into the MSA, particularly with a view to supporting catchment-scale restoration.

### **5.4. Wild Salmon Strategy**

A meeting of the Delivery Group and Wild Salmon Strategy Science Advisory Group were held since the last Board meeting. Updates were provided on structural changes and policy updates from the Scottish Government, an uplift in forestry grant funding for riparian tree planting and SEPA's approach to water scarcity and barrier easement/removal.

In order to mitigate and reduce expected delays in some aspects of the Implementation plan, due to resource constraints across Government, FMS will take the lead on preparatory work on a number of important workstreams in order to ensure momentum is maintained, with support from Angling Scotland and the Missing Salmon Alliance.

AW gave an overview of the last meeting of the Science Advisory Board, which met for the second time in August, which focussed on finalising advice to support the Scottish Government Stocking Policy, with a particular focus on rivers where local stocks are becoming progressively weaker.

### **5.5. Biodiversity Strategy and Natural Environment Bill**

AW highlighted some positive elements of the recently launched Strategic Framework for Biodiversity, which comprises the final version of the strategy, the first 5-year delivery plan and the proposed natural environment bill. The deadline for responses is set for the end of December. FMS will prepare a response and it will be shared with the Board and members. **ACTION: AW**

## **5.6. Sea lice risk assessment framework**

CM provided a detailed update with regards to SEPA's sea lice risk assessment framework and consultation. CM has engaged extensively with both SEPA and members to clarify aspects of the consultation and raise concerns where necessary, allowing members to raise any issues to be incorporated into the FMS response, and the final response has now been submitted to SEPA.

CM highlighted the key concerns of the proposed framework to the Board but reiterated the positives of having a regulatory framework in place to manage sea lice interactions between farmed and wild fish for the first time in Scotland.

CM updated the Board on recent visits to sites across Scotland, where direct support has been provided to the membership to support sea lice monitoring work and interactions with the aquaculture industry.

CM reported on raising concerns regarding the use of Environmental Management Plans and the handling of fish farm escapes to the relevant bodies in recent months, and also on supporting members to raise relevant issues relating to the Aquaculture Stewardship Council (ASC) certification scheme.

## **5.7. Saprolegnia PhD**

AW gave an update on the developments of the Saprolegnia PhD project, which is in the final stages of agreeing a contract with the University of Aberdeen, and more detail will be available soon.

## **5.8. SFCC**

AW provided an update on behalf of SR on recent activities of the SFCC, including work on recent funding bids, the fishery management planning project and training provision. SFCC have provided in-person electro-fishing training to over 50 candidates across the Introductory, Team Leader and refresher models, as well as freshwater pearl mussel training hosted by Ness DSFB, and an online course on introduction to GIS for the Working with Rivers scheme.

## **5.9. Pink Salmon**

BD provided an update on pink salmon management and surveillance actions. Work was completed on a range of actions relating to management and surveillance, including support for the pink salmon trap on the River Thurso, an eDNA sampling programme across Scotland and the purchase of sampling kits/consumables. Sampling commenced across 15 rivers, in addition to baseline sampling carried out by SEPA, and thanks to the rapid response of FMS and its members on a limited timescale, this work will provide a good dataset to work with and build on in future years.

BD recently attended and provided support at an online event, Invasive Pink Salmon – Managing the Threat, held by the Missing Salmon Alliance. BD led two sessions at the event, to provide context of the situation in Scotland and highlight the role of FMS and

its members in terms of strategic planning of management and surveillance and actions being taken at a more local level.

**6. AOB**

AL sought an update on the Moray Firth Tracking Project. As this is not an FMS project, it was suggested that contact is made with MS in her Atlantic Salmon Trust capacity. **ACTION: AL/MS**

LH raised the issue of seal predation and the risks of interactions between seals and salmon having greater significance if fisheries continue to decline. AW reported that all seal management applications have been turned down in the current year. AW will raise this with the licensing team, including the use of conservation gradings as part of this process. The outcome of these discussions will be reported back to the Board. **ACTION: AW**

**2023 meetings** 30 November (AGM)