

Fisheries Management Scotland

Meeting of Directors - Minutes

Monday 29 January 2024



By Videoconference

Present

Richard Sankey
Jamie Stewart
Melanie Smith
Alasdair Laing
Peter Landale
Alexa MacAuslan
Alexander Scott
Richard Miller
Lorraine Hawkins

In attendance

Alan Wells
Brian Davidson
Jenny McNeill
Paul Sizeland
Sean Robertson
Leah Reinfranck
Helen Feenan

1. Apologies for absence and welcome to new Directors and staff

Apologies were received from Jamie Ribbens and Bob Younger.

There have been a number of changes to the FMS Board and staff team since the last meeting. The chairman welcomed Richie Miller and Bob Younger to the Board, following their election at the AGM in November. The Chairman also extended a warm welcome to Helen Feenan as the new Aquaculture Interactions Manager, and Leah Reinfranck as FIRNS project intern.

2. Declaration of interests

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

3. Actions arising from September Board meeting

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

AW provided an update on a recent meeting with policy officials in the Marine Directorate, to discuss ongoing issues of seal incursions into rivers and associated licensing issues, including the use of the river grading system. Scottish Government committed to raise these issues with the Licensing Operations Team and NatureScot.

AW also met with NatureScot in January, and it was highlighted that the wider review of species licensing, led by NatureScot, is due to start soon.

4. Financial monthly reports

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

5. Board vacancies

There are currently two vacancies on the FMS Board - one is an appointed DSFB director, and the other is the new category of an early career director.

A number of considerations were discussed including geographic representation, diversity and the skills register. It was agreed that the Tay DSFB would be approached. **ACTION: AW/RS**

For the early career directorship, there were a few expressions of interest prior to the AGM from the membership, however this vacancy remains outstanding. A further approach to the network to gauge interest in this position was agreed. **ACTION: BD**

6. Communications

6.1. Annual Conference 2024

The 2024 Annual Conference will be held on Thursday 28 March at the Aviemore MacDonald Resort. There was a short discussion about the theme and content of the programme. It was agreed that FMS staff would circulate a draft programme to the Board incorporating these ideas. **ACTION: BD**

6.2. Annual Review 2024

BD provided an update on the 2024 Annual Review, which is currently being developed. The review will be launched at the conference on 28 March.

7. Policy Updates

7.1. Update on current funding and projects

AW provided an update on the progress of a large number of projects FMS have been running this financial year.

Funding was awarded from Scottish Government to continue the National Electrofishing Programme for Scotland (NEPS) in 2023, as well as Adult Salmon Sampling and West Coast Sea lice Monitoring. A further grant was recently awarded in recognition of FMS contribution to supporting the delivery of the Wild Salmon Strategy Delivery Plan and to support the Saprolegnia PhD. The total value of these grants was £540,000. The NEPS, Adult Sampling and West Coast Monitoring grants are all completed, and funding has been received.

FMS was also awarded four grants from Marine Fund Scotland, to cover pink salmon eDNA monitoring work, the second phase of Fisheries Management Plans, and two grants for the purchase of electrofishing equipment and acoustic deterrent devices respectively. These grants total £760,000, as announced on 29 January by Scottish Ministers.

AW updated the Board on the progress of these projects, which are almost complete. All contributions from FMS members have been received for the Saprolegnia PhD, with field sampling due to commence soon.

A funding application was lodged to Crown Estate Scotland to support an additional policy post within FMS, to increase our capacity to deliver across the range of issues that our rivers and fish are facing. This will enable FMS to fully contribute to supporting key strategies and policies, including the Wild Salmon Strategy, Biodiversity Strategy, the Riverwoods Initiative, River Basin Management Planning and the design of successor arrangements. This bid was successful, and CES have agreed to fund this role for a period of 3 years. Further details will be agreed in the coming weeks. The staff team were congratulated on these successes, which represented a significant benefit to the FMS membership.

7.2. Scottish Government Strategies

AW provided an update on the wild salmon and biodiversity strategies. A substantial response was submitted to the recent consultation on the biodiversity strategy, and FMS will continue to engage with the process this year, including the forthcoming Natural Environment Bill, and statutory nature restoration targets.

Fisheries Management Scotland will take the lead on preparatory work on a number of important workstreams in order to ensure momentum is maintained in the delivery of the strategy. BD is leading a workstream to provide recommendations on changes to the enforcement regime and a proposal will be submitted by within the weeks following the Board meeting.

The Science Advisory Board met again in late 2024, and is progressing thinking on Scotland's Stocking Policy, in particular in relation to rivers with salmon stocks that are close to extinction.

Regarding disease, biosecurity and INNS, in addition to the Saprolegnia PhD, AW is chairing a working group which is in the final stages of developing a Scottish Angling Pathway Action Plan – the next meeting of the group was set for early February and the plan relates to biosecurity and the prevention of introduction of INNS.

AW will chair a task and finish group to undertake a broad review of the current policy framework. The membership currently includes JS and AM from the FMS Board, in addition to Roger Knight and Alison Baker. There will also be input from Scottish Government officials and a member of the Marine Analytical Unit will support on financial issues. A key task of this group is to examine new ways in which we can better support and resource local management, so this group is particularly key to securing sustainable funding.

As has been identified previously, SEPA have a central role to play in the implementation of the Wild Salmon Strategy. FMS will host a bi-annual stakeholder engagement session

with key SEPA staff, and planning for the first meeting is in progress. In addition, the Hydro Committee is in the final stages of prioritising actions to feed into SEPA's ongoing hydro review.

Work is expected to begin soon, in collaboration with partners in the Missing Salmon Alliance, to update catch and release guidance, incorporating the recommendations of the Science Advisory Board on fishing in high temperatures and placing a stronger focus on reducing air exposure of captured fish.

AW also chairs a Fish and Fisheries Group as part of the Scottish Beaver Strategy. The group is now undertaking a prioritisation exercise to identify key tasks to be taken forward in 2024. Melanie Smith, James Hunt and David Summers are on the group along with partners from GWCT, Wild Trout Trust, Beaver Trust, Stirling University and a range of public bodies across the UK.

The Board discussed the importance of developing a secure, long-term funding mechanism to support the work of Boards and Trusts.

7.3. Saprolegnia PhD

AW provided an update on progress on the Saprolegnia PhD and the engagement with FMS members. A steering group is being put together for the project, on which the Fish Health Inspectorate have agreed to participate.

AW highlighted the priorities for this project, with sampling in year 1 set to include regular collection of water samples from each participating river to allow identification of the range of Oomycete strains across the country. The programme is designed to include a range of rivers including those where mortalities are currently low to non-existent, and with no signs of Saprolegniosis; those where mortalities are moderate, and there are visible signs of the disease; and those where mortalities are high, and salmon have been seriously affected by the disease.

7.4. Nature Finance

PS gave an update on recent nature finance activity, which has been focussed on managing the FIRNS-funded project which is now in full swing. £92,000 was secured to develop ideas for a 'source to sea' fund, building on the Scottish Marine Environmental Enhancement Fund (SMEEF), with a view to creating a river catchment restoration fund. Finance Earth and Howell Marine have been engaged to deliver the main contract, and LR has been recruited to focus on community benefit aspects of the fund. The consultants have maintained close contact with PS and the project steering group to develop initial views on how the fund might be structured and whether it should be a single fund covering freshwater/marine interests together, or as separated or twinned funds. The initial focus for investment is through ESG (Environmental, Social and Governance) corporate commitments and voluntary offsetting, similar to the model employed by SMEEF.

PS reported that he is preparing a second bid to FIRNS, with a view to building a strategic picture of restoration opportunities across all our members catchments using the outputs from the fisheries management planning process. It will involve having close conversations with our members to assess readiness for delivery, investment and explore the scope for clustering sites to achieve scale. This will complement the work under the current FIRNS project in moving our members closer to investment readiness.

It was highlighted that a database of skills within the FMS network would be highly beneficial to support members access opportunities for catchment restoration work.

ACTION: BD

7.5. Aquaculture Interactions work

HF introduced herself to the Board, having joined FMS in January as the new Aquaculture Interactions Manager.

AW reported that SEPA have published their response to the consultation on the sea lice risk assessment framework, and the new regulatory regime will start on 1 February. This is an important milestone, but ensuring robust delivery of the framework, and supporting SEPA in developing a suitable monitoring programme will be a key focus for HF in future. Whilst much of the regulatory framework will be as set out in last years' consultation, there were some areas where our call for change was successful, particularly in relation to sea trout and the spatial extent of some wild salmon protection zones.

SEPA have indicated that they intend to take a more holistic approach to protection of sea trout, in advance of a bespoke regulatory regime being developed. Given that SEPA's initial proposal was to exclude sea trout entirely, this represents a significant change in approach over the two consultation exercises.

In January, the Scottish Government announced that fish farm consenting pilots would proceed in the Shetland Islands Council and Highland Council areas. A working group has designed a new management process for pre-application activities which seeks to minimise delays by streamlining and removing unnecessary duplication in the pre-application process, whilst ensuring robust environmental assessment is maintained.

7.6. SFCC

SR updated the Board on recent SFCC activities, including training delivery, and the role that SFCC has played in the development and delivery of the Marine Fund Scotland Grants highlighted above.

SFCC Biologist's Conference was held in Faskally in early February, using a hybrid format allowing us speakers from the USA and Canada to present at the conference.

SR provided an update on the Fisheries Management Planning project, which will be completed by the financial year end. In addition to supporting local management, this

important information can be displayed on a national dashboard and will help inform our Nature Finance work. Additionally, SR has been contributing to our work on nature finance, through a water metrics and standards working group and to the Riverwoods Science Group.

7.7. Missing Salmon Alliance

AW updated the Board on plans for the MSA to hold an international conference in London on January 2025. AW has joined the steering committee for this event. Wendy Kenyon, who was previously the assistant secretary to NASCO has joined the MSA as Programme Manager to lead this important piece of work. PL been working extremely hard to raise funds for the existing programme of MSA work.

8. AOB

None

2024 meetings (27 March, (prior to conference), 21 June, 20 September, AGM TBC)