

SFCC Management Committee Meeting
5th October 2023
10:00 – 12:00



1. Welcome and apologies for absence

Marcus Walters – Deveron, Bogie & Isla Rivers Charitable Trust (Chair)
Joanna Girvan – Forth Rivers Trust
James Hunt – The Tweed Foundation
Rowan McCleary – Galloway Fisheries Trust
Sean Robertson – Scottish Fisheries Coordination Centre
Alan Wells – Fisheries Management Scotland
Ruth Watts – Beaully District Salmon Fishery Board
Lyndsay Christie – Marine Directorate
John Armstrong – Marine Directorate

Apologies

Kjersti Birkland – SEPA
Antje Branding – Marine Directorate

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

Actions from the previous meeting had been resolved, with the exception of investigating access to Ordnance Survey basemaps via the Public Sector Geospatial Agreement. This is currently ongoing, as it can be linked to the Fishery Management Planning project. Also of note is that partners of the Catchment Based Approach in England and Wales are able to access OS basemaps through DEFRA as a project partner.

Some discussion about training was undertaken, where the possibility of using AI or ChatGPT integrated with Excel for data analysis as a potential training offering was explored. A ChatGPT can sometimes give erroneous answers, however exploring the principal of using AI and exploring some training options for this would be feasible in the long term.

3. Staff Report from Sean – May to October

Sean delivered a presentation on SFCC activities since the last committee meeting. Highlights involved expanding the pink salmon recording app to cover England and Wales, delivering GIS training for the Working with Rivers scheme, working with Paul Sizeland and attending meetings on the development of water monitoring metrics. Sean also attended a meeting of the Riverwoods science group at Beldorny Estate, and led on a Marine Fund application to purchase new electrofishing equipment for members. As well as the GIS training, electrofishing and FWPM courses have also been delivered, alongside a site visit to the Allt Lorgy River Restoration.

4. Biologists Conference 2024 – Themes & Speakers

The annual biologists conference resumes in February 2024. Earlier this year it was held as hybrid conference, which was felt to be a great success. With lessons learned from running it in this fashion this year, we believe that it could be run again as a hybrid conference in 2024 with

some small improvements. It was agreed to run the conference as a hybrid option, again at Faskally House.

Ideas for themes and potential speakers were discussed. Fish Counters could be a good session with recent developments in AI, and other video and sonar counters that have been installed across Scotland. A session on Pink Salmon would be good to disseminate the results of work coordinated by FMS, undertaken by members and the Marine Directorate. The traps deployed to capture pink salmon on the Thurso could also be discussed.

Marine survival was raised, and suggested to look to Norway for a potential guest speaker as there is some active research ongoing about survival at sea.

A representative from UHI was present at the conference earlier this year, and was good to have them engaged and an update on their work. The committee were keen that Victoria Pritchard could come back next year and give more general updates, or to discuss a specific project such as SAL-MOVE.

There is also a lot of work taking place involving habitat improvement and large woody structures, and the possibility of a session covering the circumstances in which such interventions should be considered was discussed. Additionally, the Tweed Foundation have been working with a company developing temperature loggers with live data streamed to their website. The company have indicated their interest in giving a presentation.

5. Financial matters

5.1. Cashflow report

The cashflow report was circulated in advance of the meeting. Payment is awaited from one member subscription, and the contribution from the Marine Directorate will be processed as a grant going forward.

5.2. 2024 – 2025 budget

In line with the reserves policy, SFCC has been using small amounts of reserves to bring the amount of money being held down to 6 months of operating costs. Going forward SFCC should aim to balance income and expenditure on an annual basis, and additional income streams may need to be explored. The committee discussed options for increasing income including: making more from project management, which has been conservative with the current state of public funding; increasing membership subscription; and adjusting fees for training courses. Some discussion was had on whether fees should be linked to inflation, but as SFCC fees were reduced in 2020 due to covid, it was agreed to reset the SFCC membership subscription to the pre-covid level of £1,200 for the next financial year.

5.3. Use of SFCC Reserves to aid cashflow for Marine Fund projects

FMS have two successful projects which have been funded by the Marine Fund, the second phase of fishery management plans and pink salmon monitoring. A further two applications have gone in, for Electrofishing equipment to add resilience to the delivery of NEPS, and for seal scarers for rivers across Scotland. The expenditure is quite significant, with the electrofishing equipment application alone being over £300K. As the Marine Fund pays upon expenditure, and in order to maintain a healthy cashflow, the committee approved the temporary use of SFCC reserves to aid in cash flow if these two new applications are successful. Any money used from SFCC reserves will be paid back in full following claims from the grants.

6. Riverwoods Digital Centre for Excellence Proposal

The Scottish Wildlife Trust led Riverwoods project have been in touch in regards to the development of a digital centre for excellence. This is likely to be an ArcGIS Hub site which will function as a project register and signpost to resources to aid in tree planting projects for land owners and project managers such as fishery trusts. In order to ensure the longevity of the system past the 4 year funding agreement of Riverwoods, it is has been proposed that the system is built under SFCC's GIS account. This will ensure the longevity of the Digital Centre for Excellence, and gives us ownership of the data going forward. This approach is much easier than the system being built under SWT's account and then being transferred to another Riverwoods Partner.

With the current proposal, a Riverwoods Staff member would be spending around 2 days a week on this for a year, beginning in June next year. Riverwoods would pay for any software costs needed for this (which are around £6k a year for Hub Premium) and part of the proposal is to work with us to identify funding methods to keep this going after the 4 year funding cycle has been completed. Some management time from the SFCC manager would also be required to oversee this.

In principle the committee were happy to go proceed. The outputs could be very valuable for members, and it is work investing some time to ensure that the end product works for members.

7. SFCC Development Strategy

At this point in time SFCC wish to begin working on a development strategy. Sean has been involved in some large project grant applications this year which are of benefit to SFCC members, but going forward it would be good to look at our activities in a structured way and perhaps think about bringing in more resource if needed. We would aim to have this strategy for comment at the November committee meeting and then present a final version at the biologists conference in February.

The committee agreed that the development of a strategy was a positive step forward. There was some discussion about where SFCC fits with other NGO's and the Wild Salmon Strategy, and potentially bringing in more staff. In reference to the Wild Salmon Strategy, it was mentioned that Sean could attend one of the delivery group meetings to talk about the work of SFCC to see how it fits in.

8. AOB

Ruth informed the committee that she would soon be on maternity leave, and unfortunately the new biologist at the Beauly would be unable to take her place on the committee.