

Fisheries Management Scotland

Meeting of Directors - Minutes

20th September 2024

By Videoconference



Present

Richard Sankey
Alasdair Laing
Alexa MacAuslan
Richard Miller
Lorraine Hawkins
Claire Mercer Nairne
Jamie Ribbens
Alexander Scott

Robert Younger

In attendance

Alan Wells
Brian Davidson
Jenny McNeill
Paul Sizeland
Sean Robertson
Chloe Grant

1. Apologies for absence and welcome

Apologies were received from Jamie Stewart and Peter Landale.

Richard Sankey welcomed Chloe Grant, who joined FMS in April as Wild Salmon Conservation Manager, and Guy Harris of Findhorn Nairn and Lossie Rivers Trust, as new early career director to their first Board meeting. GH provided a brief introduction on his background and is very much looking forward to working with the Board.

2. Declaration of interests

The register of interest was circulated prior to the meeting, with no changes reported.

3. Actions arising from June Board meeting

All actions from the previous board meeting were reported as complete or are covered in the meeting agenda.

4. Good governance – discussion paper

BD circulated a paper in advance of the meeting to help aid discussion on how Fisheries Management Scotland can update our Code of Practice to support good governance within the network.

The Board discussed the paper, with a focus on ensuring that Fisheries Management Scotland members have access to tools and resources to effectively manage good governance. Issues discussed included an induction process for new board members and trustees, developing job descriptions for key posts, the use of a skills register to support members, to be framed within a revised members code of practice. It was agreed that a small governance sub-group would be established to take this forward and initial proposals would be discussed further at the AGM in November. **ACTION: BD**

5. Salmon conservation policy - discussion paper

The Board considered a paper covering salmon conservation policy, in the context of the IUCN endangered status of salmon. Whilst this reclassification presents us with a useful advocacy tool in demanding greater and faster action to protect and restore wild salmon, we also need to recognise that it also raises legitimate questions about killing an endangered species. The paper recognised the significant, proactive action that has been taken to date, and raised some questions about further action that could be taken, including promotion and adoption of a voluntary policy of 100% catch and release in all grade 1 and 2 rivers in Scotland.

Following a detailed discussion in which a range of views were aired, the Board agreed that promoting 100% catch and release for both salmon and sea trout should be prioritised. It was agreed that two separate motions (covering salmon and sea trout respectively) would be tabled at the AGM in November asking members to adopt a voluntary conservation policy of 100% catch and release. **ACTION: AW**

6. Election of directors

The register of directors was circulated ahead of the meeting. In accordance with FMS articles, PL, LH and AL will step down as Directors at the AGM in November having served two consecutive terms. MS and AM will also be stepping down as Directors at the AGM. RS thanked the departing Board members for their significant contribution to FMS. RS will continue as chair into 2025, until a suitable successor can be found.

7. Financial

• 2025 Budget

The draft 2025 budget was circulated prior to the Board meeting. BD 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.

• Financial reports

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

• Draft accounts

The draft annual accounts to March 2024 were circulated in advance of the meeting. BD provided an overview of the accounts, highlighting the secure financial position of FMS.

• Website redesign

BD outlined plans to update the FMS website within the current financial year, seeking approval for associated spending of up to £10K. The Board approved expenditure to support this project. **ACTION: BD**

8. Staff Updates

8.1. Update on current funding and projects:

- **Current Projects**

BD provided an update on projects, confirming that work is already underway on three projects which are;

- Biosecurity Measure to protect wild salmon, to include supply of disinfectant and sprayers, and design/supply signage and posters to FMS members
- Improving AVIMS technology (Auto Video Identification for Marine Species) on the River Ayr Fish Counter
- Developing AI tools for counting salmon from sonar cameras

The majority of the funding is for acquisition of equipment and software development for the benefit FMS members.

AW provided an update on the 2024 adult sampling programme which was funded again in 2024.

- **Nature Finance**

PS provided an update on a FIRNS-funded project to inform the development of a River Catchment Restoration Fund, utilising the Fishery Management Plans developed across Scotland to identify ready-to-go river restoration projects. A steering group has been formed to support this project with representatives from NatureScot, SEPA, Marine Directorate, Crown Estate Scotland, Atlantic Salmon Trust, and a number of FMS members.

LR has met with 19 FMS members across 34 river districts to date, exploring information obtained through fishery management plans to identify suitable actions to move forward as projects, in accordance with the requirements of the portfolio. A tender has been granted to deliver the monitoring framework for the river catchment restoration fund, and Julia McCarthy, river ecologist, has been appointed to deliver this contract.

Following approaches by SPEN (Scottish Power Energy Networks) and a workshop FMS held for members in the south of Scotland where SPEN operates, PS announced that two FMS members have submitted bids for projects to SPEN's BNG fund, which if approved will fund projects up to £350,000. FMS is organising a BNG awareness workshop in Moffat and on the Annan in October for members in the south of Scotland to understand more fully the operational, capacity and legal implications of managing BNG projects. As recommended by the Rivers Trust, the General Manager of the English Calder Rivers Trust who have a few years of BNG experience will be the key resource.

PS recently met with the Private Investment in Natural Capital (PINC) Group of the Scottish Government, who wanted to learn of our experience with BNG and SPEN. PINC are working on developing biodiversity metrics that would be suitable for Scotland and therefore have an interest in the BNG mechanism.

8.2. Wild Salmon Strategy

AW provided an update on the Wild Salmon Strategy workstreams. The Wild Salmon Strategy (WSS) delivery group are scheduled to meet in October. The focus of this meeting will be predation by birds and seals. FMS have also requested a discussion about the action should be taken by Scottish Government and Agencies to help restore grade 3 rivers across Scotland, building on the FMS response to the conservation regulations consultation.

Planning is in progress for the third meeting of the Governance and Finance group, which will focus on creating a sustainable funding structure for local management, in parallel with discussions about the most suitable governance and constitution to take this forward. **ACTION: AW**

CG and BD are leading the delivery of Action 2.6 under the WSS, focussed on refreshing guidance on best practice catch and release. This new guidance will have an emphasis on water temperature, air exposure, adopting a hands-off approach, and biosecurity. A steering group has been established, tasked with designing and delivering several key outputs, including an educational video, guidance on various items including developing fish handling policies and social media-targeted campaigns. Work has already begun on developing these outputs, which are scheduled to be delivered on a rolling basis between November 2024 and summer 2025.

The science and evidence Board met in August to discuss the developing approach to 'recovery stocking' of Atlantic salmon into weak populations. An updated paper has since been circulated to the group and comments have been provided. A further meeting will be arranged in the near future to complete this process prior to reporting to the WSS delivery group.

8.3. Aquaculture interaction

AW provided an update on the forthcoming fish health workshop which has been sponsored by Crown Estate Scotland.

In August, Helen Feenan (HF) provided technical support to the Annan Board on local issues relating to the conversion of a trout farm to a salmon farm.

FMS remain engaged in the SLRF implementation, and we continue to emphasise that the purpose of the framework is to provide protection for wild (endangered) fish populations. AW accentuated the need for a robust and fit for purpose process, but also something that is delivered in a reasonable timeframe.

Through HFs engagement with Trusts on the development of SEPA's sea lice monitoring programme, it has become apparent that several west coast trusts are reliant, to a greater or lesser extent, on public funding to deliver aquaculture-related monitoring

work. This is clearly a risk and it was agreed that a more -resilient funding model is required. **ACTION AW/HF**

8.4. SFCC

AW provided an update on recent activity of the SFCC, with SR leading on two ongoing projects in relation to software for fish counting.

SFCC have delivered annual electrofishing and freshwater pearl mussel survey training over the summer, which have been well attended by members and other agencies across Scotland.

SR continues to work with the GIS team at Marine Directorate about the legacy of the Fisheries Management plans, as internally there is some restructuring of GIS accounts. SR has been heavily involved in this process to ensure the FMP's and salmon pressures outputs will remain live and accessible for members. Additionally, SR will be presenting about the FMPs at the ESRI Scottish Conference in Perth in late September.

SR has also been engaging with Centre of Expertise for Waters (CREW) regarding plans for a workshop on freshwater and wetland monitoring and has contributed to a NatureScot workshop on river cooling for their new natural capital tool which is in development.

8.5. Membership of Fisheries Management Scotland

AW highlighted that many parts of Scotland are thinking about fisheries management in terms of the wider river catchment, with a clear understanding that impacts on our rivers and fisheries are a product of all of the activities taking place within that catchment and coastal environment. FMS are working closely with the Spey Catchment Initiative and Tweed Forum on nature finance and through the Riverwoods Initiative. It was agreed to consider further the potential for widening the membership to encompass such bodies and that a proposal should be developed for discussion and agreement at the AGM. **ACTION: AW**

9. Update on inshore committee work

A paper was circulated in advance of the meeting to facilitate discussion around work RY has been engaged with as a member of the Scottish Government's Fisheries Management and Conservation Group (FMAC). The Board were fully supportive of FMS engagement in this process, through RY, and agreed that wider engagement with the membership would help this work. **ACTION: AW/RY**

10. Health and Safety update

BD provided a brief update on Health and Safety, with the full FMS team due to undergo training later in the year to ensure policies and practice are up to date.

11. 2025 Conference

The Board discussed the 2025 Annual Conference, following an overview of the 2024 conference survey results. Options for next year's conference programme and location will be explored further and information will be provided in early 2025. **ACTION: AW/BD**

12. AOB

It was noted that several DSFBs have received correspondence regarding recent work to develop a sea lice model for the Northern Isles. AW noted that he was aware of this work but needed to look at the fine detail of the modelling approach before drawing conclusions on any implications for wild salmon and sea trout. AW and HF will discuss this work further with the modeller and will recommend next steps after that meeting.

2024 meetings – AGM 13th November