

Fisheries Management Scotland

Meeting of Directors - Minutes

20 March 2025

Murrayshall Country Estate, by Scone, Perth



Present

Richard Sankey

Jamie Stewart

Amelia Heath

Guy Harris

Richard Miller

Lorna Lyle

Richard Davies

Claire Mercer Nairne

Jamie Ribbens

Robert Younger

In attendance

Alan Wells

Jenny McNeill

Paul Sizeland

Sean Robertson

Helen Feenan

1. Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from David Johnstone and Edward Humphrey.

The Chairman announced that Alexander Scott has stepped down from the FMS Board following his retiral from Spey DSFB.

2. Declaration of interests

The register of interest was circulated ahead of the meeting, with a declaration from RM provided at the meeting.

3. Actions arising from January Board meeting

There were four actions from the January Board meeting which have all been completed or are in progress.

4. Board composition and chairman

At the last meeting, RS expressed his intention to step down from the Board once a suitable replacement was identified. David Johnstone was identified as an ideal candidate and following previous discussions, the Board were pleased that David has agreed to take on the role. The Board expressed gratitude to RS in his time as FMS Chair.

As RS stood on the Board as an elected director, a new candidate will need to be elected from the membership. This will be arranged in due course. **ACTION: BD**

As previously noted, Alexander Scott has stepped down from the Board. As his position was appointed, a new appointment needs to be made. RS asked the Board to consider potential candidates for this role, with consideration of the skills register to establish any skill gaps on the Board. This will be followed up at the next Board meeting in June. **ACTION: ALL**

5. Nature Finance – next steps

PS provided an overview of recent Facility for Investment Ready Nature in Scotland (FIRNS) activities, currently focused on completing the final phase of the current project ending in March.

Since the last Board meeting, a comprehensive monitoring framework for the fund was completed by a consultant to ensure baselines and monitoring methods align with impact reporting for corporate contributors. A Stakeholder Engagement and Benefit Realisation Strategy has also been prepared to embed people considerations into projects. A final project report is in progress, setting the stage for the next phase, which involves marketing and fund hosting arrangements.

PS submitted a bid to the third round of FIRNS, aiming to support the fund's launch within the coming year and retain the Project Officer. The decision on the most suitable fund host is ongoing, with a number of options being considered. Discussions with membership will take place in the coming weeks to outline the options. Additionally, a six-month marketing exercise with businesses will soon begin, led by a marketing/communications agency to refine the offer and secure corporate contributions.

PS is also exploring one-on-one nature finance opportunities with potential funders, including SSEN and SPEN, using the Biodiversity Net Gain metrics and methods currently operating in England.

The Board discussed the process of selecting who will host the fund, assessing pros and cons and decision-making process.

6. 2025 Conference & members' meeting

AW provided an overview of arrangements ahead of the members meeting and Annual Conference. Two workshops were planned for the members meeting: one on financial support for local management and another on the FMS strategy update. Between them, the staff LR, CG and SR delivered an interactive, 'gamified' session simulating catchment management.

AW confirmed that the First Minister would provide the opening address at the conference in person, as well as participating in a Q&A session after his talk. Taking on board feedback from last year's conference, this year's conference incorporated professional audio support and enhanced interaction with Q&A opportunities.

7. Membership of FMS – Orkney Waters Trust

AW provided an update on recent discussions on the inclusion of Orkney Waters Trust as an FMS member. Following discussion on the activities and priorities of the Trust, Board members agreed that Orkney Waters Trust would join FMS this year, and AW will follow up with the trust. **ACTION: AW**

8. Staff Updates

8.1. Wild Salmon Strategy

In late February, AW and CG attended a meeting of the Wild Salmon Strategy Delivery Board which was also attended by the Seal Policy and Natural Environment Bill teams. Key topics included the lack of tools to address predation impacts, the increasing volume of marine renewable developments, pumped storage hydro, the Scottish Government stocking policy and discussing the most effective means by which the delivery board could engage with key initiatives like the Natural Environment Bill and National Marine Plan 2. On predation, it was decided to hold a dedicated meeting, for which AW is coordinating with John Armstrong to move this forward.

8.2. Fisheries Management Scotland Strategy

AW provided a short update on the progress of the FMS strategy. As noted earlier, the team will test the goals and associated objectives at the members meeting. AW has also been developing the narrative for the document, and this will be discussed with the steering group in April.

8.3. Missing Salmon Alliance

AW advised the Board that a meeting was due to be held with MSA at the end of March to discuss 2024-25 and future funding. A number of the FMS team attended the Wild Salmon Connections event in January. AW highlighted that this was an excellent event, and this would be covered in more detail at the Conference. The shortfall in expected funding in relation to the budgeted MSA support was noted by the board.

8.4. Aquaculture Interactions

HF provided an update on recent workstreams. Scottish Government have commenced a work package to introduce penalties for escapes and a small sub-group including FMS, trout and salmon farming representatives has been formed. Broadly, all representatives seem content with the principle of introducing penalties for escapes as this was one of the agreed actions contained in the Salmon Interactions Working Group.

As previously reported, the aquaculture sector have appealed SEPA permit conditions relating to the sea lice regulatory framework. The appeals are complex and detailed in nature but are focused on permit conditions.

The aquaculture sector has put forward several grounds of appeal that they believe are relevant including:

- SEPA operating outside the remit of CAR by seeking to establish marine pen farming as an activity which should be licensed and regulated under CAR
- SEPA imposing conditions unlawfully as the powers of CAR have not been triggered
- SEPA have failed to follow statutory procedure for these variations
- Failure to comply with Regulators' Code of Practice
- Flawed methodology to calculate sea lice limits

HF highlighted the three likely outcomes to this process which are;

- The appeals are unsuccessful
- Ministers may take the decision not to quash the variations in full but require amendments to be made reflecting the issues that have been raised
- If the appeals are successful then the variations will be quashed

HF explained that the short-term plan is to review the appeals and draft a representation to the Planning and Environmental Appeals Division and to draft a position statement for our website and for members to use should there be any questions about our response to this.

8.5. Natural Environment Bill

FMS have identified the Bill as an opportunity to amend the 2003 Act and increase penalties for a number of the most serious poaching offences. The Bill team provided evidence to the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee, and Elena Whitham MSP raised the fish poaching issue on our behalf. AW has secured a meeting with Mairi Gougeon to discuss this further. RY is working on draft amendments for Stage 2 of the bill.

The team intend to work closely with Buglife and other Scottish Environment LINK members on the broader aspects of the bill, sharing ideas ahead of Stage 1.

8.6. SFCC

SFCC's annual biologist's conference was held earlier in February and was well attended by the membership and representatives from Scottish Government. Priorities for the coming year include working with the Scottish Wildlife Trust on creating and hosting the Riverwoods Digital Centre for Excellence, as well as renewing the material for the Freshwater Pearl Mussel course and the SFCC Fish Habitat Walkover Survey. A workshop on the fish habitat survey was held at the conference, and responses have been written up.

At the conference there was also interest from the membership in pooling together under a SFCC account for GIS. This offers multiple benefits such as making collaboration easier, as well as having access to more accounts and "viewer" accounts to give secure access to maps which members want to keep private. Work is underway setting this up, it will offer significant benefits to members but will also demand a lot of administrative time.

SR has been leading on two Marine Fund Scotland projects and is in the process of concluding these.

9. Health and Safety Update

RS provided an update on Health and Safety, including recent discussions with Greens of Haddington to ensure that FMS H&S systems are compliant with public contracting

requirements, and more specifically the proposed FMS tender for wild fish monitoring on the west coast. This builds on and complements the actions from the H&S training undertaken by the FMS team last year. This has been a useful exercise and will have value for FMS moving forward. AW and BD attended a meeting with Lochaber Trust in March on operational health and safety.

10. Financial

The latest financial reports were circulated in advance of the meeting. BD and JM recently held an online session on FMS financial processes with new Directors, as well as a more in-depth discussion in person with AH, who has agreed to offer support and oversight on financial management.

AW provided an update on Marine Fund Scotland projects, which are proceeding as planned and expected to finalise at end of March.

11. AOB

The Board discussed format and timing of future conferences.

AW updated the board on grant funding which has been agreed with Scottish Government to support our work on nature finance until FIRNS 3 commences in June (if the application is successful). This funding will allow the retention of Leah Reinfranck, who will contribute to scoping work on socio-economics as part of the wild salmon strategy, in addition to supporting work to advance the Scottish Rivers Fund.

2025 meetings – 18 June, 24 September