

Fisheries Management Scotland

Meeting of Directors - Minutes

18th June 2025

By Videoconference



Present

David Johnstone
Edward Humphrey
Jamie Stewart
Richard Miller
Lorna Lyle
Richard Davies
Claire Mercer Nairne
Jamie Ribbens
Robert Younger

In attendance

Alan Wells
Brian Davidson
Chloe Grant
Paul Sizeland
Sean Robertson
Helen Feenan

1. Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Amelia Heath, Edward Mountain and Guy Harris.

2. Declaration of interests

There was a single change to the register of interest that was highlighted by EH. **ACTION: BD** to amend the Register accordingly.

3. Actions arising from March Board meeting

All actions from the March Board meeting have been completed or are in progress.

4. Director vacancies

DJ reported two Board vacancies following resignations by Richard Sankey and Sandy Scott—one appointed, one elected. The Board previously agreed to appoint Edward Mountain (Spey DSFB). The required paperwork has been completed, but EM was unable to attend the June meeting due to a prior commitment. The remaining elected vacancy will be filled through member nominations in due course.

AW noted that GH was due to step down as the early career representative at the November AGM. It was agreed that the emerging Early Careers group could help identify potential new candidates.

5. Financial

5.1 Financial reports to end May

Financial reports to end May were circulated before the meeting. DJ praised the clarity and ease of understanding of the reports, thanking the team for their excellent work.

5.2 Planned approach for funding applications

- Nature Finance

PS reported Leah left FMS to pursue a new role with Findhorn, Nairn, and Lossie Rivers Trust. Recruitment is underway for a Nature Finance Manager, funded by a £200K FIRNS 3 grant award. This project has now started, with a formal announcement expected the week of 23 June. FIRNS 2 deliverables are complete and online.

The FMS team are collaborating with NatureScot and SMEEF to host the Fund, with a MoU in progress. A number of potential corporate leads have been identified - the new Manager will coordinate outreach and member support ahead of the Fund's planned launch before March 2026.

FMS also contributes to Scottish Government work on nature market standards. The Board discussed a possible formal Fund launch involving the Cabinet Secretary.

- Marine Fund Scotland

BD reported that the fund opened in early June, with FMS applying for two projects: enforcement and monitoring equipment (£596K) and fish counter AI development (~£100K).

BD highlighted potential cashflow challenges as a result of upfront payments, with a plan shared in advance on how this can be mitigated. The late fund opening delayed awards until September, making pink salmon funding unfeasible. Alternative funding, including underwriting, is being considered.

To manage cashflow risk, directors support a business overdraft. Dropping the pink salmon project eases pressure, but an overdraft may still be needed. The bank requires financial checks from all directors, and BD will circulate the request.

ACTION:BD

- Adult Salmon Sampling Programme

AW confirmed that the Adult Salmon Sampling Programme would run again this year. The programme will cover six rivers across Scotland, with the potential inclusion of the Thurso if their salmon trap were to be operational in 2025.

AW noted that the data collected – including length and weight measurements and information from scale samples – feeds directly into the Scottish Government's conservation assessments, contributing to the wider evidence base for salmon management.

6. Updates on key policy areas

The Board discussed current catch and river levels within their respective catchments.

6.1. Wild Salmon Strategy

- Annual Progress Report

AW noted that the Annual Progress Report has now been published. CG worked with officials to restructure the report and develop a wider narrative, including additional information that was not included in the previous report.

AW noted that FMS led several workstreams, such as updating catch and release guidance and developing recommendations for stable funding of local management organisations.

- Supporting local management

FMS is leading on Action 5.1 of the Wild Salmon Strategy - reviewing the current policy framework and funding arrangements for local managers. Five key challenges facing fisheries managers have been identified: unsustainable funding, limited capacity, governance barriers, gaps in coverage, and structural issues with public funding. To address these challenges, a number of draft recommendations have been drafted, and shared with FMS members for feedback. Key proposals include reinvesting fine proceeds locally, securing baseline public funding, exploring water user levies, and building capacity through finance training.

- Predation

Seal scarers were deployed in a number of Scottish rivers following a successful FMS bid to Marine Fund Scotland. Although the effectiveness of these ADDs was limited in most circumstances, this information was fed into the seal licensing review. For the first time since the process began, FMS members were directly invited to contribute to the review. Early feedback from the Marine Directorate is encouraging, with a number of changes to the seal licensing process under consideration. FMS also received early sight of the scientific advice report developed by the NERC Special Committee on Seals. This report is not yet publicly available, but FMS were given permission to share with members in advance of publication.

AW noted ongoing work with Dee DSFB and SMRU testing new detect and deter technology on the River Dee. The Board suggested that FMS ask Scottish Government to include the impact of seals and related pressures in the socioeconomic study. **ACTION: AW**

- Science & Evidence Board

The Science and Evidence Board are in the final stages of reviewing options for stocking and hatchery interventions in rivers nearing extirpation. Key issues identified for future discussion included harmonising monitoring between public and private sectors, impacts of predation, effects of adding large woody material, and reviewing pressures on Atlantic salmon.

- Socio economic study

FMS secured a small Scottish Government grant to advance thinking and provide recommendations to inform the Wild Salmon Strategy action to: Undertake an

analysis of the environmental and socio-economic benefits arising from healthy wild salmon populations, ensuring their existence value is recognised.

Before leaving, Leah completed a detailed analysis and drafted a report based on extensive member consultations from summer 2024. The report was discussed with officials mid-June and, pending their confirmation, completes the agreed work. A copy will be shared with the Board. **ACTION: AW**

- Catch & release best practice

CG reported that in February, FMS launched updated catch and release guidance, supported by a steering group and fulfilling Wild Salmon Strategy Action 2.4. A short film accompanying the guidance is near completion, with Board feedback—including new Tay footage—incorporated. Though delayed, priority was given to reflecting quality input over rushing the launch. After the launch, a promotional campaign will follow via social media, press, and outreach through members, agents, and angling clubs. CG invited Board support to help share the film widely.

6.2. North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organisation

AW and CG attended the recent NASCO meeting, where NGOs expressed frustration over the lack of urgency from Parties. AW challenged the Strategic Goal wording—to only “slow the decline” of wild Atlantic salmon—citing alarming ICES data. Despite some support, the change was not adopted. A new reporting cycle was agreed, requiring Parties to identify actions on their top three pressures. In Scotland, this will use the FMS–Scottish Government pressures analysis, with further discussion planned via the Delivery Board.

6.3. Natural Environment Bill

AW reported that FMS has developed proposals to increase penalties for serious fish poaching, recognised in Scotland as a wildlife crime. Despite poaching having the highest conviction rate of any class of wildlife crime, penalties remain low and insufficient as a deterrent. BY helped draft amendments to the Natural Environment (Scotland) Bill and AW and CG will work with MSPs with a view to tabling amendments at Stage Two, expected in October.

6.4. Fisheries Management Scotland Strategy

AW reported that following the strategy workshop held at the March Members’ meeting, feedback had been incorporated into the Goals and Objectives. Associated targets are under development. The next step would be to discuss the strategy with the steering group before sharing a full draft with the Board. He also noted that consideration was being given to how best to integrate the strategy into day-to-day operations and the performance appraisal process.

6.5. Aquaculture Interactions

HF reported that the Fish Farming Committee restructure was completed in May, creating a technical and strategy group plus a mailing list for broader aquaculture

updates. These smaller groups have already proved to be effective in supporting direction and decision-making. HF provided an update on the recent appeals of the SEPA sea lice regulatory framework and associated monitoring.

6.6. Marine renewables

AW reported that the number of applications for offshore wind development in Scotland are increasing and emphasised that more needed to be done to understand potential impacts, mitigate these where possible and protect wild salmon from any impacts. FMS recently met with relevant agencies and officials to highlight resource challenges and explore options for more effective working. FMS has formed a Marine Renewables Working Group and has prepared a generic consultation response to support members. This will be circulated to the Board and all FMS members once finalised. **ACTION: AW**

FMS also plans to develop guidance on onshore infrastructure, focusing on river crossings for cable routes. **ACTION: AW**

6.7. Good governance framework

One of FMS's priorities this year is to launch a revised governance framework for members. This will include updated codes of conduct for DSFBs and Trusts, along with a new induction process for incoming DSFB members and trustees. A sub-group of the Board—CMN, BY, JS, and JR—is feeding into the process and are expected to review the revised DSFB code at a meeting scheduled in mid-June. Once the framework is finalised, it will go out for wider consultation with the aim of launching later in 2025.

6.8. SFCC

SR reported that SFCC's summer electrofishing training is scheduled to start in Inverness and Galloway. Chris Daphne is revamping the freshwater pearl mussel (FWPM) course into a two-day programme with assessments on ecology, handling, and relocation.

Work is also underway to update the Fish Habitat Survey Protocol.

SR noted ongoing talks with NatureScot about a third round of the Working with Rivers Scheme, which offers 3 to 6 month internships to FMS members. NatureScot are exploring options for funding, including the SSE Regional Community Fund.

7. Health and Safety update

BD reported that there were no health and safety issues to raise. Significant progress has been made in establishing robust systems across the team, which have also supported project funding applications. These systems are regularly reviewed, with ongoing staff discussions and clear channels for raising any concerns.

8. AOB

The Board discussed concerns around renewable development, including the need to clearly distinguish between baseline and pre-construction monitoring. Concerns were raised about outdated baseline data being used as pre-construction monitoring and surveys being conducted post-consent, reducing their value.

Following a question about the Scottish Animal Welfare Commission report - *Ascribing sentience to fish: potential policy implications*, AW confirmed that FMS had not been contacted as part of this process. Whilst it was felt that the report would be unlikely to lead to changes in the current approach, FMS would remain alert to any implications arising from this report.

RM queried the sand eel fishing ban and possible impacts from UK–EU relations. AW confirmed the Scottish ban was upheld with no risk, and the UK ban remained in place with some procedural clarifications. RY agreed.

The Board discussed concerns over Scottish Forestry's enforcement of planting standards in riparian zones, citing a case where non-compliant planting continued unchecked. It was noted that if planting is FGS-funded, Scottish Forestry can enforce standards, but powers over privately funded planting would need further clarification.

2025 meetings Wednesday 24 September, AGM - TBC