

## MINUTES OF WRASFB BOARD MEETING

<b>HARBOUR CENTRE, GAIRLOCH</b>		<b>PRESENT:</b>	
<b>DATE:</b>	17 October 2017	Bill Whyte (BW) Chair	Stephen Bate (SB)
<b>OPENED AT:</b>	11.00	Hugh Whittle (HW)	Donald Rice (DR)
<b>CLOSED AT:</b>	15.00	Neil Morrison (NM)	Colin Blyth (CB)
<b>IN ATTENDANCE:</b>		Gordon Crawford (GC)	Rosie Nicoll (RN)
Peter Jarosz (PJ)	Peter Cunningham (PC)	<b>APOLOGIES:</b>	
Mary Gibson (MG)		Brian Fraser (BF)	Johnny Whitteridge (JW)

### 1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Johnny Whitteridge and Brian Fraser.

### 2. Approval of the minutes of the 28<sup>th</sup> April 2017 Meeting

The minutes of the 28<sup>th</sup> April 2017 were accepted as an accurate record of the meeting (proposed by SB and seconded by HW) – with one amendment under AOCB of “Charlie Hill is now at the Glen Mhor Estate” and not at Glenelg Estate – as previously stated.

### 3. Matters Arising

Fisheries Management Scotland.

BW sits on both the FMS Board and the FMS Enforcement Committee. This puts a West Coast input into forming FMS policies at all levels including carrying out the required enforcement duties without full time bailiffs. For the record, WRASFB has four bailiffs that are authorized, but not employed, by the board.

BW and PJ sit on the West Coast Aquaculture Committee that is made up from representatives from all the Boards and Trusts in the Aquaculture Zone. These bodies inform the FMS policy on Aquaculture and present a united front.

Currently, the SSPO reports on 31 aquaculture areas but aquaculture is now looking to produce EMPs for each Fisheries Trust area – which means EMPs being produced for an area rather than a specific fish farm.

The EMP outcome for Sgeir Dughall has implications for the other three fish farms that are subject to ten-year conditions. For some considerable time WRASFB has been requesting information regarding the production of an EMP for Sgeir Dughall with little success. The Board’s remit for wild salmonids makes the board’s involvement in the development/production of an EMP a pre-requisite. But it would appear that discussions relating to an EMP for Sgier Dughall have only involved the Highland Council and the Scottish Salmon Company, so WRASFB has now requested all information on Sgeir Dughall under FOI.

Additionally, the Board has also requested, again under FOI, all information regarding the CLEUD decision for Ardessie A and B.

### 4. New Rateable Values

In June of this year new rateable values for all the fisheries were produced and sent out by the Valuation Assessors office.

The previous (2010) rateable value collectively was £34,375.00p.a. from which the £0.90p levy rate realised some £30,937.75p.a. as the Board’s income.

The new rateable value for 2017 if levied at £0.90p would realise £41,152.50p.a. – a 30% increase.

The rationale for rateable value increases is based on a number of “factors” – the considered rentable value of each fishery in question, the reported catch figures over a five-year period and the assignment of a “price per fish”. The “price per fish” varies between £35 and £65 per fish. This fluctuation seems to be influenced by the weight of the reported catches and also has a subjective element to it.

This increased valuation for fisheries has happened in the year that sporting rates have been introduced and when all fish caught must be returned alive to the river.

It should be noted that not all Rateable Value have increased – some remain unchanged and some have actually decreased.

If the Board were to set a £0.90p levy on the proposed new Rateable Values it would result in additional funds (for the board) that would be nice to have in reserve. But a 30% increase would hurt proprietors and their businesses. Costs of this order would have to be passed onto clients and that could result in fewer lets and, therefore, less income etc. and a downward spiral.

Whilst it is the Board that sets the levy rate, it is the Valuation Assessment Office that sets the Rateable Values. So although the Board cannot influence the Rateable Values of each fishery, the Board can set a different levy rate that could reduce the levy amount charged to the estates.

Based on the new Rateable Valuations, reducing the levy to £0.75p in the £ would realise £34,293.75 and reducing it to £0.70p in the £ would realise £32,007.50.

It is proposed, therefore, that we reduce the levy - we just need to decide on the rate in the pound for the levy once we have the finalised Rateable Valuation figures for each fishery.

## **5. Financies**

PJ passed round the meeting two documents. One was the budget that we set at our meeting in April 2017 and the second was a half-year statement of actual income and expenditure to date that also included a projection of income and expenditure for the remainder of the financial year. The budget/forecast had predicted a near neutral outcome with little change to the holding reserve that was agreed necessary some two years ago. The half-year document showed that we started the year with some £20K in the bank and with some £9K of outstanding liabilities. The levy income of £31K and the anticipated total yearly expenditure of £39K (this includes the £9K of liabilities) should see a closing bank balance of circa £13K.

## **6. Update on Events since the last Board Meeting**

Update on Aquaculture events since last Board meeting (BW):

- The Scottish Sea Farms (SSF) has proposed amalgamating its three farms (Tanera and Fada) and locating it in a new position (2047 tonnes) for which a Scoping and Screening application has been submitted.
- SSF has also submitted a Scoping and Screening application for a new 1972 tonne farm at Horse Island.
- Marine Harvest Scotland (MHS) has submitted a Scoping and Screening application for Bottle Island and the Highland Council has decided that an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is required.
- The recently renewed lease for the Annat Bay fish farm site is now with Wester Ross Fisheries (WRF). Whilst this site may not be used by WRF, it may well be a valuable bargaining ploy.

- The WRF sites at Ardessie A and B are “consented” by a CLEUD and only Ardessie A is operational with Ardessie B currently not even in situ. The CLEUD permission is the subject of an objection by WRASFB and the board has lodged a request under FOI for all information relating to both the submission and the decision-making processes of the CLEUD.
- The WRF site at Corrie is operational as is their Ardmail site though this site is operating at significantly lower biomass than consented.
- In all the WRF sites are consented at 6700 tonnes but are only operating at 3000 tonnes – has this led to their ability in controlling sea lice numbers?
- It is worth noting that the new farms, that currently have applications submitted to HC planning, will increase the biomass by 7000 tonnes in this area and that will make sea lice control on all farms, both the new and the currently operational farms, much more difficult.
- Loch Ewe is now restocked though with its biomass reduced to 770 tonnes. At 770 tonnes there seemed a possibility that this further reduction of biomass might make the farm non-viable financially. But even at 770 tonnes and with no on-farm problems it is possible for the farm to harvest 1000 tonnes whilst keeping under their biomass ceiling of 770 tonnes. At the current market price for farmed salmon this would probably give the farm a modest profit margin.
- Sgeir Dughall is currently empty – as are all of the farms in Torridon – due to early harvesting because of a serious disease problem that appears to be similar (or the same) as the disease problem on fish farms in the Isle of Harris. Have these diseases shown up in wild salmonids – PJ to ask Jim Raffell if he has noted any problems in his returning fish. To date the Board has not been involved in the discussion/agreement/endorsement of an EMP for Sgeir Dughall and under EIR and FOI has requested information from Highland Council regarding the EMP process for Sgeir Dughall.
- For the record, there has been a recent interesting outcome from a Lochaber planning application on a podcast of the planning committee’s proceedings. The Committee Members were recommended to approve the application despite there being a robust objection by the LDSFB. One of the Committee Members noted that normally he would not give his approval in a case like this but, “given that their decision would be challenged and put before DPEA, who would overturn it”, he considered any objection on his part as a waste of time,

## **7. Biologist’s Report**

Peter C had previously emailed round a copy of his biologist’s report and used a PowerPoint presentation to talk the meeting through some of the detail from his report.

## **8. Recap on Board’s Work Plan for 2017-18**

As reported at our April 2017 meeting it was the Board’s intention to continue with its pursuance of positive outcomes for both the Sgeir Dughall and the Ardessie fish farm issues. Both have been reported on in section **6 (Update on Events since the last Board Meeting)** above under bullet points 5 and 10.

## 9. Community Relations – Education and Young Fishers' Projects

- Loch Maree Management Project (BW) - this project was originally envisaged to take advantage of the possible closure of the Isle Ewe fish farm when the biomass was reduced to 770 tonnes. There are now fewer larger/older sea trout than in the past showing that the sea trout are not surviving year on year. This result has also been observed in the MS Shieldaig project where recently no sea trout larger than 50cms have been recorded. The Loch Maree Management Project will initially focus on the freshwater environment:
- The freshwater environment will include all the science and practical work to increase smolt production; complete surveys of all spawning burns - identifying those used by sea trout. This should produce a work programme to clean out/improve them all. Then electro-fish them all - establishing which spawning burns are productive and why others are not.
- The marine environment will include telemetry tracking to identify smolts leaving the loch into the river (and river into the sea); sea bed surveys of the existing and the former fish farm sites in Loch Ewe; telemetry tracking on sea trout movements within Loch Ewe (this could be difficult during 2018 as the borrowing of telemetry kit in Scotland may not be available).
- There is some information on trout populations in Loch Maree that has been gathered over a number of years by Dr Steve Kett of Middlesex University. In the autumn of this year the intention is to look at sea trout spawning burns with the possible de-silting of some burns by way of habitat restoration of these spawning burns. The questions that need answering are – what is the relationship between brown and sea trout; what is the trigger that makes a sea trout go to sea and which burns are better for sea trout? By also looking at the genetics of the trout populations in Loch Maree we may have results from all the work that will have implications for any stocking management.
- The Board hopes to start talks with the Loch Maree Hotel about taking on the boats from them in an attempt to increase fishing effort. The hotel does not want to promote fishing using their boats as the hotel business itself has been priority for them.
- The Board's Work Plan 2018-19 will include some work (on the Loch Maree Management Project) within the Loch Maree catchment with links to proprietors and community liaison and be led by Marine Scotland/Crown Estate/Glasgow University. It will require partners as well as funding so links to existing hydro schemes will be examined/contacted.
- Next year there will be an expansion of the fieldwork at the MS Shieldaig station in Torridon to involve a telemetry tracking project of sea trout in Loch Torridon. SWRFT hopes to have discussions with Marine Scotland Science to explore potential links and collaboration.
- GC offered the opportunity to copy old game books that go back to 1896 for the Little Gruinard River – there is a role for old records.
- There is also a role for the Biosphere – the opportunity to build in elements of and relationships to Demonstration, Improved Management, Ecosystem Services,

Landscape Scale Management, Flood Management, Knowledge Transfer, Research, Fishing and Fishing Effort.

- The hypothesis is that sea trout have the capacity to recover. So we need to see if this is the case – given the current low biomass of farmed fish over the next three years.
- We could make the project larger or smaller depending on a number of issues. BW will prioritise and flesh out the proposal.
- There is a role for the Wester Ross Marine Protected Area (MPA) in tackling marine problems in the north of our area. There is a monitoring meeting (31/10/2017) for the MPA - generally involving a range of partners. The intention is to involve everyone but there is a requirement for funding.

## **10. Anglers' Representative's Report**

- A possible angling competition between the Gairloch and Ullapool High Schools is unlikely to occur as the Gairloch High School favours teaching fishing rather than a fishing competition – hence the possibility of fly fishing instruction. However, CB has received no replies (from Dr James Close) to his recent emails and understands that the problem may well be reduced staff numbers in particular for the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme. CB will pursue this for a happening in next year.
- CB reported on issues between the Poolewe Angling Club and the River Ewe bailiff. Although fishing opportunities are being offered by the estate for fishing on the River Ewe the Club has not been taken up these offers.

## **11. AOCB**

- **Report on Proprietors' and Public Meetings**

This year's Proprietors' and Public meeting took place on the 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2017 with a number of proprietors present but no member of the public attending. The prepared accounts were approved and an excellent chairman's report was received with much interest.

- **Catch Returns**

The Board still does not receive catch returns from all proprietors. At some time in the future catch returns made to Marine Scotland will be accessible digitally but for the present it is important that the Board receives the information directly.

- **Stocking consents**

It is also important, as well as a legal requirement, that the Board receives requests for any stocking of salmonids into rivers.

- **New Bailiffs**

There was no further update on this item.

- **Piscivorous Ducks**

The Board will co-ordinate the application for a license to control fish eating birds but requires information both on the numbers of birds and documented evidence of serious damage. Can SNH supply the protocol for the collection of this information?

- **SWRFT**

The Wester Ross Fisheries Trust (WRFT) and the Skye Fisheries Trust (SFT) have amalgamated and are now known as the Skye & Wester Ross Fisheries Trust (SWRFT). After many years of mutual co-operation with WRFT providing the biologists for most of the fieldwork on Skye it made real value in the WRFT and SFT merger. SWRFT is a Scottish charity and a company limited by guarantee with directors.

At this point BW stated that although FMOs are not going ahead ScotGov were looking to achieve some voluntary amalgamations of District Fishery Boards with the offer of one off payments to pilot mergers. WRASFB were offered £79K for a merger with the SDSFB. WRASFB is large enough and the disparity between the levy rates of the two boards is considerable. Therefore this merger will not be followed up.

## **11. Date of Next Meeting**

**The suggested timing for the next board meeting is April 2018 - but the actual date will be determined after the results of a doodle poll.**