

MINUTES OF WRASFB BOARD MEETING

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| HARBOUR CENTRE, GAIRLOCH | PRESENT: | |
| DATE: 03 November 2014 | Bill Whyte (BW) Chair | Donald Rice (DR) |
| OPENED AT:11.30 CLOSED AT:15.00 | Philippa Cliff (PhC) [Iain Russell's mandate] | Ray Dingwall (RD) |
| IN ATTENDANCE: | Rosie Nicoll (RN) | Ray Dingwall (RD) |
| Peter Jarosz (PJ) Mary Gibson (MG) | Brian Fraser (BF) | APOLOGIES: |
| Peter Cunningham (PC) Stuart Allinson (SA) | Jamie Crawford (JC) | Gordon Crawford (GC) |
| | Hugh Whittle (HW) | Stephen Bate (SB) |
| | Frank Buckley (FB) | Iain MacFadyen (IM) |

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Jamie Crawford, Gordon Crawford, Hugh Whittle, Stephen Bate, Iain MacFadyen and Frank Buckley.

2. Approval of the minutes of the 11th March Meeting

The minutes of the 11th March 2014 were accepted as a true record of the proceedings of that meeting, proposed by DR, seconded by PhC and approved by the board.

3. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising that are not being dealt with by the items of the agenda.

4. Update on Aquaculture issues since the last Board meeting

- An Interaction Pilot meeting of the Loch Torridon area with both fish farms that operate in that area and WRASFB involved, took place in October. The meeting was brokered by Crown Estate who set out the information requirements. The fish farm companies are still wary of supplying "raw" data information and of including MSS in these meetings.
- The Scottish Salmon Company (SSC) has lodged an appeal to DPEA following the refusal, by Highland Council Planning in August, of their S42 planning application for their site at Sgeir Dughall in Loch Torridon. This appeal is on the grounds of a legal challenge to the setting of a ten year time limitation on the original planning application approval. This appeal, to which the board will submit a rigorous response, has now been referred to a Reporter for determination (date set at 20th January 2015). This is a very important case as it has implications for three other planning consents (with ten year limitations) within the board area. It is worth noting that an appeal against a decision in Orkney, where the council set a four year limit, was successful with the Reporter ruling against the time limited term.

5. Update on Proprietors' and Public meetings

The Proprietors' and the Public meetings that are required by the Act were incorporated into a single meeting that the board held in May 2014. The meeting was well attended by proprietors but only one member of the public attended. The meeting approved the board's 2013-14 accounts as well as the board's annual report – both of which were later submitted to Scottish Government.

6. Scottish Government's Fisheries Review

ASFB has undertaken a review/precis of the findings of the Wild Fisheries Review and this will be circulated to all boards for their views. WRASFB needs to determine what its position is - as potentially there is likely to be some 5 years for further consultation prior to any implementation. The general feeling appears to be that recommendations cannot be challenged legally and that changes will occur. It is also unclear what the role of fish farm companies will be in the future of wild fisheries but is it not more than probable that they will be included in

FMOs? They may well be considered by the review process as key stakeholders within the new FMOs. The funding of FMOs (within the new proposed system) is far from clear. Undoubtedly, some funding will continue to come from levies, with some funds from Scottish Government (SG) but probably none from stakeholders.

7. 2014-15 Levy/Finance - Latest

- Only one levy invoice remains outstanding and this (remaining invoice) may need to be apportioned between the Loch Maree Hotel and the Gairloch Estate as they have 2 of the 8 boats that were originally part of the hotel's fishing rights.
- The Board's core costs were originally budgeted at £7.6K for the year. With the exception of an invoice for £1K for legal advice relating to the SSC's S42 planning application, it seems that these core costs should actually fall in line with the original budget figures.
- The Board has made full use of our membership of Fish Legal this year and the work, done for the Board by Fish Legal, has far exceeded the annual subscription costs. Should the Board make a charitable contribution in recognition of this fact?

8. Planning Applications

- See item under **4.** bullet point two.
- There have also been a number of hydro scheme planning applications that have been responded to by the Board – the most recent of which is on the Bruachaig. The Board's response to this application will be discussed, after this meeting, by email.

9. WRFT Biologist's Report

- To date catch reports are mixed with overall poor returns for salmon though with slightly better returns for sea trout.
- From both sweep-net monitoring and rod catches fish have been in good condition generally and with few lice.
- Fish farms in the Board's area are in the first year of their production cycle with the farms at Ardessie being fallow.
- Problems with sea lice on the fish farms in the Loch Alsh area have been reported. Similarly fish farms further south (outwith the Board's area) have also reported sea lice problems.
- PC was encouraged to undertake fish farm visits after first drawing up a protocol to set out how these visits should be conducted, agreeing this protocol with the Board and then sending out the agreed protocol to the fish farms within the Board's area. The focus should be on sampling more fish rather than less.
- PC gave an update on the proposed MPA for Wester Ross, stating that:
 1. Management measures/options are to be consulted on.
 2. The Wester Ross MPA will focus on particular protected species/habitats.
 3. There are possible voluntary exclusion zones for scallop dredging – this will be informed by additional survey work for maerl beds.
 4. Clarification for the selection of maerl beds is required as is what exactly is the interim approach for their protection.
- The WRFT Review is to include a two-page report from WRASFB. Once complete the Review will go on-line and a few hard copies will be produced for estates to hand out and have in their lodges.
- Wrasse are being used by Wester Ross Fisheries Ltd in their attempt to control sea lice numbers on their fish.

10. AOCB

- Some catch returns were brought into the meeting and a reminder that all catch returns should be made to the Board will be sent out.
- Any stocking must be authorised by the Board and estates should make sure they register their applications to stock in good time, prior to stocking. Justification for stocking can relate to compensating for redd washout in the winter months and the attempt to safeguard the percentage of returning fish to the system.
- PhC reported that the Coulin estate will commence building their hydro-schemes in January 2015, starting first with the main scheme at Easan Dorcha and then followed by the scheme at Torrin. Grid connection is anticipated to be in the final quarter of 2016.
- FB (angling representative) had previously reported a number of fishing incidents on Loch Maree that suggested that the voluntary fishing protocol, established some time ago, was not being adhered to. It was agreed that a ghillies/bailiffs' meeting will be organised for next March in the Loch Maree Hotel. This should present an opportunity for the re-affirmation of the voluntary fishing protocol for the loch.
- Reports have also been made to the Board of illegal methods of fishing and of poaching in a number of places within the Board's area. These reports have been taken very seriously and bailiffs have been actively policing these places. In two of these reported places the appearance of bailiffs immediately ended the illegal activity.
- WRASFB is looking to appoint two new bailiffs as soon as they can be registered for training.
- The WRASFB web site is being upgraded with links to specific Highland Council (HC) planning applications. These links will be to the HC web site so that all documents relating to any specific application can be viewed thus saving considerable data space on our web site. Information relating to the different rivers within Board's area will also be upgraded.
- RD raised an issue of fish eating birds and the current damage they are causing to fish stocks. Control of these predators is by licence only – so who is the licencing authority and what is required to support an application for their control? SNH will provide information on the process of licence application and, following that provision, WRASFB will progress an application.
- PC is seeking financial support for a project to interview old ghillies in order to capture historical information that will soon be lost if nothing is done to record and archive it. PC is also looking for names of suitable people to interview. The project could consider interviewing people who were fishing both before and after the introduction of fish farming. The Board was generally supportive of the project and some financial support in part could come from the Board's contingency fund and then used to seek matched funding. An approach for funding could be made to individual proprietors.

11. Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next board meeting will be determined after the results of a Doodle poll.