

MINUTES OF WRASFB BOARD MEETING

HARBOUR CENTRE, GAIRLOCH		PRESENT:	
DATE:	25 October 2016	Bill Whyte (BW) Chair	Stephen Bate (SB)
OPENED AT:	11.00	Hugh Whittle (HW)	Donald Rice (DR)
CLOSED AT:	15.30	Rosie Nicoll (RN)	Neil Morrison (NM)
IN ATTENDANCE:		Brian Fraser (BF) – mandated by Gordon Crawford	
Peter Jarosz (PJ)	Peter Cunningham (PC)	APOLOGIES:	
Mary Gibson (MG)		Gordon Crawford (GC)	Colin Blyth (CB)
		Dave Barclay (DB)	

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Gordon Crawford, Colin Blyth and Dave Barclay.

2. Approval of the minutes of the 29th March 2016 Meeting

The minutes of the 29th March 2016 will be accepted as a true record of the proceedings of that meeting once all the Board Members have had the opportunity to read through them (as they had not previously been distributed).

3. Matters Arising

Any matters arising will be dealt with using the items on the agenda.

4. Planning Applications / Update on aquaculture issues since the last board meeting

The following applications were discussed:

- Camas an Leim - a restricted order movement of fish within the loch has been in place since July 2016. The order is in response to a Notifiable Disease (BKD) that was identified at Camas an Leim in the June of this year. The Board was not notified.
- Loch Ewe - there have been unconfirmed reports of major fish mortality at the Loch Ewe fish farm. The new well boat was seen to be visiting this farm on two separate occasions with a two week "gap" in between visits. This has been confirmed by MH as parasite problems.
- Ardessie A - the fact that this site failed its environment test has been related back to Highland Council in a WRASFB response to the HC's approval of the CLEUD application. The Board has contested the CLEUD decision by stating that this environmental monitoring test failure is relevant to any planning decision and was not made available to HC until after that planning approval had been given by HC. To date the Board has not received an answer from HC.
- Sgeir Dughall - despite at least two attempts to solicit a response from HC regarding their part in the SIST "letter of understanding regarding the joint Environmental Monitoring Plan", there has been no acknowledgement of the Board's email inquiries nor any answers to the important questions posed to HC in the Board's emails. Meanwhile MSS have written to the DPEA expressing their concerns/doubts with the EMP's proposed protocol for sea lice management.
- West Strome – the current SSC fish farm at Mid Strome is failing its benthic impact assessments so a new site has been re-configured that overlaps with Mid Strome. Because of this overlapping and the indifferent benthic impact assessments at Mid Strome, SEPA has requested more monitoring and there will be no progress on the re-configured site until improvements are evident.

- Aird – despite their management failures on their other sites in Loch Torridon, TSSC has applied for a biomass increase for its Aird fish farm. SEPA are now ready to grant this increase. However, because the Board objected to SEPA regarding this biomass increase, the Board had the option to appeal the case to Scottish Ministers (SM). This appeal has been lodged with SM requesting that they decide the case for the biomass increase by considering all impacts to wild salmonids rather than the singular remit that SEPA has for benthic impact.
- Summer Isles, Bottle Island and Horse Island – two different fish farm companies are involved here. The Scottish Sea Farms want to give up their 3 sites at the Summer Isles (Fada and Tannera 1 and 2) for a 3500 tonnes new site at Horse Island. At the same time, Marine Harvest Scotland want to give up their Isle Ewe fish farm for a new 2500 tonnes site at Bottle Island. Both these sites are within the Wester Ross Marine Protected Area (MPA). DR and BW are working closely with Sea Change - a group, based in Ullapool, set up to monitor the MPA. They do not have financial resources but do have a wide range of resources that they can call on. They have already carried out a number of dive surveys, using scallop and recreational divers, on the proposed fish farm sites so that they can better address the planning applications when they are submitted. Sea Change has applied for some grant funding to enable them to do further surveying within the MPA and to aid these surveys BW has offered the use of his own boat as a dive and support platform. Dive surveys around Bottle Island and the Summer Isles will help define the current status and new sites of Eelgrass and Maerl have been found. Further surveys are scheduled for 5th and 6th November. A grant of £150,000 from HLF is being applied for jointly with Glasgow University (David Bailey) for a survey project within the MPA with the focus on Maerl, Skate (though this species is not a protected feature of the MPA), Herring and Sea Trout.

5. Biologist's Report

Peter C had previously emailed round a copy of his biologist's report and talked the meeting through some of the detail from his report:

- A glocedhia survey has been completed on the River Kerry.
- Electrofishing surveys have been done on the Langwell system to monitor the effects of HES schemes and the flows over the waterfall.
- PC has also completed a number of juvenile fish surveys including the Dundonnell and Gruinard rivers.
- This year's data from the Tournai trap clearly indicates that the returning fish are getting thinner.
- PC reported that few fish had been caught in the sweep netting at Boor Bay. However PC was able to note that, to the north of the Board's area, the sweep netting indicated that there had been less issues with sea lice. Whereas there are still issues to the south with fish caught at Balmacara in June with 250+ sea lice.
- A FMP report has been completed but has not, as yet, been supplied to the owner.
- There is the possibility of some tree planting along the River Torridon and PC will meet up with Will Gray to further discuss.
- There is a relationship between Herring and Sea Trout with Herring being a valuable food source for Sea Trout. From the interviews of the old Herring fishermen we know that Herring spawning grounds are near Greenstone Point and Melvaig during the month of March.
- There is a ban on trawling within the WR MPA.

- The WR Biosphere includes shore waters.
- Loch Maree has known areas of spawning brown trout.

6. Board's Work Plan for 2016-17

- New education projects still need to be developed further and WRFT is taking these forward on behalf of the Board with Salmon & Trout in the Classroom and Living Lochs taking place on Skye for the first time.
- Both the WRASFB and the WRFT web sites need further development along with the Angling Information web site that is new and embryonic awaiting the construction of a smartphone App.
- As in the past, the sweep-netting programme has proved extremely valuable in providing the data that we need, especially at sites near to those fish farms that have 10-year time limits.

7. Scottish Government's Fisheries Review

- RAFTS/ASFB are currently recommending 15 FMOs across Scotland including their stated option of Skye, Wester Ross and Cromarty. Whilst the Boards and the Trust (of Skye and Wester Ross) have engaged with Cromarty, over some 12 months, to explore what we may have in common, there is no doubt that there is no common ground/good reason to be involved with Cromarty and the way forward for us is the Skye/Wester Ross FMO of our original choice. To that end the meeting re-confirmed its mandate for the chairman to oppose this RAFTS/ASFB suggested amalgamation and to write to SG informing them of our decided FMO as being Skye/Wester Ross. The Board already meets the greater majority of the functions that will be required for FMOs to perform.
- In September 2016 there was a RAFTS/AFSB Extraordinary General Meeting that was looking to reform both into a new entity named Fisheries Management Scotland. However for a number of reasons no formal decision was made/passed on the day and a further AGM meeting was organised for 17th November 2016 to "confirm" this proposal.

8. AOCB

- The SG Conservation Limits uses a modelling based on 1) data from fish counters, 2) data from rod catches and 3) also considers flow. MSS use the data to determine Conservation Limits for 2017 that resulted in many of the categories currently in place moving from category 3 to 2 and even to 1. The WR rivers have only rod data and WRFT is concerned about the models. These sudden escalations of categories are dangerous as Conservation Limits (based on the very limited data for WR rivers) are not appropriate. Many estates are happy to retain a "catch and release" policy despite these upward re-categorizations of their rivers. The Board will encourage estates to retain a "catch and release" policy regardless of their new categorization and will challenge the new categories with MSS.
- The Board held its annual Proprietors' and Public meetings on the same day in July 2016 at which one member of the public attended. As is required, both meetings will be reported to SG.
- Catch returns still usually come via MS rather than directly from proprietors though there are some notable exceptions.
- BW reminded the meeting that licences are required for the removal of brood-stock as well as for stocking out.

- Duncan Mackenzie qualified as a bailiff and Charlie Hill (Torridon) is currently training for his examinations that may be later this year. Ronnie Buchan is to be encouraged to re-take his examinations.
- The intended section of “Rivers” on the Board’s web site has made little progress so contact needs to be made with JC to get from him the data/pictures that were sent through to him by river owners.
- As mentioned at the March meeting, WRASFB owns the netting rights at Slaggan and, because it is an asset, it could end up in the hands of ScotGov (once DSFBs are dissolved). Rather than let this situation drift into being, we need to discuss the option of possibly handing over these rights to Skye & Wester Ross Fisheries Trust and that will not allow these netting rights to be used commercially or be sold on.
- PJ reported that the Board probably will end the f/y with some £18K in its bank account. Some of this may well be required to support any work/input necessary for our responses to the Summer Isles fish farm applications as well as for the ongoing saga of Sgeir Dughall.

11. Date of Next Meeting

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