

MINUTES OF WRASFB BOARD MEETING

HARBOUR CENTRE, GAIRLOCH		PRESENT:	
DATE:	11 November 2019	Bill Whyte (BW) Chair	Neil Morrison (NM)
OPENED AT:	11.30	Gordon Crawford (GC) – by Skype	Rosie Nicoll (RN)
CLOSED AT:	15.30	Donald Rice (DR) – by Skype	Ray Dingwall (RD)
IN ATTENDANCE:		APOLOGIES:	
Peter Jarosz (PJ)	Peter Cunningham (PC)	Hugh Whittle (HW)	Stuart Allison (SA)
Ian Lindsay (IL)	Mary Gibson (MG)	Stephen Bate (SB)	Ala Mackenzie (AM)

1. a) Introductions

BW welcomed IL, as chair of the SWRFT, to the meeting and introduced him the those present.

b) Apologies

Apologies were received from Stephen Bate, Hugh Whittle and Stuart Allison.

2. Approval of the minutes of the 11th April 2019 Meeting

The minutes of the 11th April 2019 were accepted as an accurate record of the meeting being proposed by RD and seconded by DR.

3. Matters Arising

- There were no matters arising that will not be covered by the agenda of the meeting.

4. 2018-19 Accounts

Any discussion on the accounts is deferred until the Proprietors' meeting scheduled to start at 14:00 hours when the accounts will be presented for approval.

5. Financial Report For the Year To Date

- PJ presented a financial precis document showing the financial projection for the year 2019-20 that had been given out at our meeting on 16th April 2019 and comparing that initial forecast with the year to date results plus a further projection of costs from 1st November 1029 to 31st March 2020. The results were very much in line with our initial forecast for the full year and should result in a year end balance of £7.5K.
- RD asked about the costs involved for any additional personnel involved in the Seal Management of our area and PJ replied that there were two additional persons who took the two day course but, despite the fact that they were supposed to have been informed of their results by mid September, so far there had been no notification. PJ had informed both Stuart and Ian Allison as well as Mark (Kannaird) and Gary Ross (Gruinard) about the course, however it was Mark and Gary that took up the offer.
- The MSS web site does not have the latest official catch returns on it so the annual report is missing this information. There appears to be an issue with catch returns and the latest Data Protection law.

6. Update on Aquaculture Events since the last Board Meeting

BW reported on what had been happening on aquaculture events since our last meeting:

- Tanera and Fada, Summer isles, (SSF) - these sites went through scoping and screening in 2018. They have not progressed into full planning applications yet.
- Horse Island, Summer Isles, (SSF) - this application for a new 2500t farm also went through scoping and screening in 2018. It is expected to progress to a full planning application soon.
- Isle Ewe (MOWI) - following yet another benthic survey failure in December 2018, their biomass was reduced in July from 870t to 580t. This coupled with the 10 year time limited permission due to expire in December 2020, led to discussions between the board and MOWI about closing down the farm. MOWI have committed to close the Isle Ewe farm at the end of this current production cycle (sometime in December 2020).

MOWI are currently appealing the biomass reduction to the DPEA. This is a procedural appeal but this will not affect the closure. It is not possible to transfer the biomass because a Carr licence is site specific.

- Aird, Loch Torridon, (SSC) - The planning application for Aird was unanimously refused by the Highland Council North Planning Committee. This refusal was mostly based around the responses from MSS and WRASFB and the concerns over wild salmonids who both stated that this proposed development “would likely cause a significant and potentially substantial impact on wild salmonids”
- The Aird planning refusal has being appealed, PJ, Stephen and BW are going through the appeal documentation to form a response. The appeal appears to revolve around SSC`s assertions that their interpretation of “insignificant impact” to wild Salmonids should outweigh the interpretation of MSS and WRASFB who both are saying that there will be significant impacts from the farm to wild salmonids.
- Other planning application responses were submitted. These were outside the board area but still close enough to cause concern to us. There were four applications on the East Coast of Skye. Three more applications for the same area (including one for Raasay) are, or will, enter the planning application stage soon.
- Another planning application for West Strome was responded to by the Board even though this farm is outwith the Board area. This application was approved by HC with the recommendation that SSC, at the end of each production cycle, have a meeting with the Board to consider the results of monitoring reports but, as this farm is not in our area, we are completely unsure how this will work.
- Last year monitoring work was done in the Ardnamurchan area that was paid for by Crown Estate. The CE would like to extend this monitoring into our area with suggested sites of either Loch Torridon or Loch Ewe. Our view is that the Loch Ewe site would prove to be a most valuable site for data following the closure of the fish farm.
- There followed some discussion regarding the need for synchronisation of both production and of EMPs in Loch Torridon and the question was asked as to just who has bought out SSC – was it a private company (Bakkafrost) based in the Faroe Islands? And does Mowi have some part ownership of Bakkafrost?
- Following a question from GC, BW confirmed that, although he will have to reduce the amount of time he has been spending on the Boards responses to planning applications, he has agreed with SB that SB will devote more of his time new planning application responses. BW will still continue to input his expertise into any new applications but will not be able to do all the work that is normally involved in preparing and finalising Board responses to planning applications..

7. SWRFT Biologist's Report

This item was left until the start of the Annual Proprietors' and the Annual Public meetings which ran concurrently starting at 14:00 hours.

Peter C had previously emailed round a copy of his biologist's report and showed a Powerpoint presentation that covered the points of his previously circulated report.

PC's report is attached at the end of these minutes.

8. Recap on Board's Work in 2019-20

Dealt with under item 6.

9. Board's Work Plan for 2020-21

Loch Maree project is still "work in progress" - there is some detailed data from project work done in 2005 which would form the basis of a project for Loch Maree but that work may need updating and possibly additional work done to augment it. IL suggested that for funding applications (to be successful) for such a project the emphasis should be on public benefits rather than on benefits to any individual owners of the fisheries. It would initially be a scoping exercise to see what we actually want to do, what funding might be available and what are the key requirements of the funder (what boxes need ticking). BW said that we should set up a steering group involving individuals from both board and trust who would concentrate down the thought process into a fully scoped out project. RD asked what would be the timescale for a scoping exercise? IL thought that it may take to the latter end of 2020 to finalize scoping and prepare the funding application. One of the main challenges for this project is to express what we want to do in terms of public benefits. RD asked PC if he could prepare a list of requirements of what might be included in such a project. Should there be a meeting of Loch Maree proprietors possibly early in the New Year to "get them on board"? BW said that the start of this is the setting up of a steering group with members from both board and trust.

10. Community Relations – Education and Young Fishers' Projects

Some of the monies that the Board donates to the SWRFT are earmarked for educational project. Along with some monies for education from the Scottish Invasive Species Initiative (SISI) Dr Lorna Brown has been engaged by SWRFT to help deliver these educational projects. IL said that the SWRFT is currently putting together an education package for funding (of some £40K per year) over 3 to 4 years which will be comprehensive in its conception.

11. Anglers' Representative's Report

AM gave a report that covered the whole of the board area starting in Ullapool and going down as far as Kinlochewe. Catches were varied and weather affected.

12. AOCB

- **Stocking consents**

The new MSS guidance means that consents will not be granted for salmon stocking. Initial talks with MSS over sea trout stocking for the Loch

Maree project look encouraging. We might just squeeze through a stocking consent for sea trout because of the genetic work that's already been done by Steve Kett and Middlesex University which could meet the Marine Scotland criteria.

Proposals for counters – we have not heard anything back from proprietors on counters so this will go on as originally decided.

- **EMPs and synchronization issues**

This item was put forward by SB and is about the need for a single EMP and synchronization in Loch Torridon (between Mowi and the SSC). The Board is unsure whether there is any real intention on behalf of the two aquaculture companies to produce a single EMP covering the whole of the loch that would be acceptable to the DPEA, HC and the Board. Additionally while the North Aird planning appeal is with the reporter it is highly unlikely that SSC will take part in any discussions on the subjects.

- **Piscivorous Ducks**

The Board has not received any reports this year of piscivorous ducks' surveys. No sighting reports to date. The only way to get a control program in place is by fisheries submitting sighting reports to the board to justify the need for control measures to be implemented. If proprietors intend to run a "shoot to scare" policy, notify the board and we will clear this with the police and SNH to cover any public concerns over illegal activities. The form that was circulated to proprietors should be used if the Board is to build up a case for any control license, against these birds, to be permitted. Action: Send out another request for reports.

- **Catch Returns**

- The Marine Scotland web site which shows the official catch returns went down and was supposed to be up and running again by mid September. As of today, that has still not happened. The annual report therefore still has the old catch returns.

The annual report will be updated prior to publication as soon as we can get the catch data by FOI. .

- DR asked if Sea Change could approach the Board to see if any of their projects may be of interest to the Board and/or Trust with a view to possible co-operation. IL did state that the Trust has just been notified of a sizeable grant from a funder for a marine based project – maybe this project offers the opportunity for possible co-operation.

13. Date of Next Meeting

The suggested date for the next board meeting is in March 2020 - so the actual date will be determined after the results of a doodle poll

1. Sea trout monitoring and sea lice (Supported by the Scottish Government and WRASFB)

As in previous years, sea trout were sampled from the sea using the sweep net in the Kanaird river estuary, Boor Bay (Loch Ewe), Flowerdale (Loch Gairloch), and at the head of Little Loch Broom (Dundonnell).

At the mouth of the **River Kanaird**, only 11 sea trout were caught in total despite much effort on two sweep netting occasions (18th June and 16th July) in 2019. All except two of these fish carried no sea lice; each of the infested fish carried just one louse. On both occasions, the River Kanaird was running at a higher level than in previous years; however other estuarine fish were caught; indicating marine conditions at high tide. In 2018, sea trout carrying 200+ sea lice were recorded at this site.

At the head of **Little Loch Broom** (Dundonnell), 19 mostly small (146mm – 280mm) sea trout were caught on the 12th August. These fish carried an average of 9.16 sea lice, mostly chalimus stage lice. In previous years we have caught just a few sea trout at this site during the summer.

At **Boor Bay** (Loch Ewe) a total of 25 sea trout were caught over two sweep netting sessions. On 15th June, 15 sea trout were caught with no or low levels of sea lice. However on 2nd July, 10 mostly small sea trout were caught carrying up to 43 sea lice. Some of these fish had lice numbers in excess of thresholds at which mortality or early return to freshwater is predicted based on analyses in Taranger et al 2014.

At **Flowerdale estuary** (Loch Gairloch), there was a total of 80 sea trout captures (including at least one sea trout caught on more than one occasion) over 4 sampling sessions (April 19th [30 sea trout]; June 7th [8 sea trout]; June 19th [26 sea trout]; September 16th [16 sea trout]). Sea trout caught in samples in April and June carried high number of sea lice (to over 250 lice per fish) an additional sample was taken just upstream of the usual site on 1st May; one of the two sea trout caught on this occasion (as part of the Wild Trout Workshop, also filmed for STV's Sean's Scotland programme) carried over 500 sea lice). In September 16 sea trout, mostly maturing females of up to 560mm in length were caught; these fish carried few sea lice in contrast to samples taken earlier in the year. Most of these fish had damaged but healed dorsal fins, indicative of sea lice infestation earlier in the year.

In October, a fyke net was set in the Sand River (Loch Gairloch) to learn more about the spawning trout population. In total there was 103 trout captures, of which 20 were mature sea trout: 8 females [largest 435mm] and 12 male trout captures [largest 410mm] (one or more of the males may have been caught twice). The remaining trout were nearly all small mature male resident brown trout. No mature female resident brown trout were caught, suggesting that the trout populations is sustained by sea going female trout rather than by resident female brown trout.

Sea lice levels reported by salmon farms in the WRASFB area for the months April to June 2019 were low for salmon farms from Loch Ewe – Two Brooms area. However, sea lice levels on salmon farms in Loch Torridon were far above the SSPO Code of Good Practice sea lice treatment threshold levels. The high lice levels reported for salmon farms in Loch Torridon correlate with the high numbers of lice seen on sea trout in the Flowerdale estuary Loch Gairloch. Some of the lice on sea trout samples in Loch Ewe may also have originated from Loch Torridon farms.

<http://scottishsalmon.co.uk/monthly-sea-lice-reports/>.

For help with sampling sea trout in WRASFB area, thank you to Mark MacKenzie and Ben Bulmer (Kaenchullish estate), Ian McFadyen (Langwell estate), Nigel Carr, Iain Muir, Keith Dunbar, Chris Beresford, Cory Jones, Annie Dickinson, Alastair Pearson, Alasdair MacDonald and Donald Rice and family and friends (Dundonnell estate); volunteers from Achiltibuie Angling Club, Mark Williams, Dr James Close, Dr Steve Kett, Bill and Fraser Anderson, Peter and Janet Davison, Duncan Donald, Bill Whyte, Ian Whyte, Len Campbell, Gary Bulmer, Chris Gudgeon, family and friends and everyone else . . .

2 Rod catches

Figures for the 2019 season to follow. Notable catches included sea trout of up to 4.5lb + in the north of the WRASFB area. Official catch figures for the 2018 season are also still awaited; unofficial figures for the Gruinard River and River Ewe system have been reported previously.

3. Juvenile fish surveys (supported by the Scottish Government and WRASFB)

The main task for SWRFT electro-fishing teams during the past summer has been to survey a series of sites in rivers across our region as part of the collaborative National Electro-fishing Programme for Scotland [NEPS]¹. The ultimate aim of the programme is to be able to obtain a data set from which the conservation status of wild salmon across Scotland can be better assessed, to complement the SG's published rod catch statistics for adult fish and information from fish counters.

Sites are randomly chosen, with several sites in some rivers and none in other rivers. This is the second year of the NEPS survey, and a total of 21 sites were fished in the SWRFT area including some sites out with the WRASFB area.

In addition to the sites for the NEP, we surveyed other sites including other nearby sites to gather additional data to inform the WRASFB and local fisheries management, making the most of our time in the field.

NEP sites were surveyed in the Kanaird, Ullapool, Dundonnell, upper Gruinard, Ewe, Kerry, and Torridon Rivers; and to the south of the WRASFB area in the Elchaig, Shiel, Glenmore and Glenbeag rivers. It was not possible to survey some of the sites on larger channels because water levels in August and September were too high. When water levels were too high for surveying NEPS sites it was sometimes possible to carry out surveys of sites in smaller rivers. Additional sites were surveyed on the Kanaird, Ullapool, Broom and in the River Ewe headwaters. Sites were also surveyed in the Tournai and Sguod river systems and several smaller streams around the Loch Maree catchment area; and also the Bruachaig (River Ewe system) to provide complimentary data.

For juvenile salmon, preliminary results [more detailed analyses to follow] indicate that salmon fry numbers (CPUE and densities) are lower at many sites than in 2018. Estimated densities of over 30 fry per 100m² were also recorded at just a few sites. In contrast, numbers of salmon parr were higher than in 2018.

Initial interpretation that the low levels of salmon fry were associated with the less stable rivers where redd washout may have been a major factor (upper Ullapool River and Dundonnell River). Low water during the salmon spawning season in November 2018 may have contributed to low numbers of salmon fry in some smaller headwater streams.

In addition to our own surveys, the SEPA e-fishing team fished sites in the River Croe during the summer of 2018; thank you to SEPA for sharing their data.

The SWRFT e-fish team has been Peter C and Colin Simpson, with Ben Rushbrooke, Finn Simpson, Gary Bulmer, David Holland, Peter Davison and family, Mark Williams, Alasdair MacDonald, Dr Steve Kett and Dr Andy Vicks, helping at sites where three or more people were required (especially some of the deeper water N sites). Thank you to Marine Science Scotland and Fraser Wilson for loan of bank-side generator powered electro-fishing equipment. Thank you also to many other helpers including friends and family of some of the above, Pete Crichton and SNH Beinn Eighe NNR volunteers, Dave Richards and family, Dr Malcolm Stewart; and Alan and Billy MacKenzie (Eileanreach Estate) and Gary Ross (Gruinard Estate) for 4x4 transport to otherwise inaccessible sites.

4. Some other activities

- Support for BW regarding various salmon farm related issues
- Scottish Invasive Species Initiative (HLF & SNH funded) Peter J and Bill W can describe . . .
- Wester Ross Biosphere . . . Natural Heritage subgroup proposed woodland fragments project

5. New projects for 2020

- Maerl beds and ecology of spawning herring areas (funded by The William Grant Foundation). This follows filming of herring spawning grounds by the late Andy Jackson in March 2019.
- Stream nutrient restoration project. This aims to raise levels of productivity of salmon streams in many rivers; please see <http://www.riverdee.org.uk/news/2019/river-dee-conservation-series-river-muick> for similar initiative in the River Dee.
- Extended education programme . . . IL or PJ can describe . . .

¹ <http://marine.gov.scot/information/national-electrofishing-programme-scotland-2018-site-locations>