

## MINUTES OF WRASFB BOARD MEETING

By Conference Call	<b>PRESENT:</b>	
<b>DATE:</b> 17 November 2020	Bill Whyte (BW) Chair	Neil Morrison (NM)
<b>OPENED AT:</b> 13.05 <b>CLOSED AT:</b> 15.15	Gordon Crawford (GC)	Rosie Nicoll (RN)
<b>IN ATTENDANCE:</b> Peter Jarosz (PJ)	Ray Dingwall (RD)	
	<b>APOLOGIES:</b>	
	Hugh Whittle (HW)	Ala Mackenzie (AM)
	Stephen Bate (SB)	Donald Rice (DR)
	Stuart Allison (SA)	

### 1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Stephen Bate, Hugh Whittle, Donald Rice, Stuart Allison and Ala Mackenzie.

### 2. Approval of the minutes/notes of the 10<sup>th</sup> September 2020 Meeting

See below for approval.

### 3. Matters Arising

- RN asked for clarification of item 6 of the September minutes/notes and BW explained that, although it will be the Loch Maree Proprietors who will run any Loch Maree project, the new WRFT (and not the SWRFT under its new name) will be the trust who will be responsible for servicing anything in the Loch Maree catchment area. RN thanked BW for this clarification.
- PJ pointed out that item 1 of the September minutes/notes called for an action point to write a letter to SWRFT setting out the Board's views on the "divorce" proceedings/outcomes. But within days of our meeting a letter arrived to the Board from SWRFT that clearly outlined their proposed outcomes of the "divorce". This cancelled out any need for the Board to write to SWRFT on this subject.
- Following the above two items, the minutes of the 10<sup>th</sup> September 2020 were accepted as an accurate record of the meeting being proposed by RN and seconded by GC.

### 4. 2020-21 Accounts

PJ had previously circulated a pdf of the analysis sheet in which he records expenditure (analyzing it into various category headings) and income month by month at the same time balancing each month with that month's bank statement. This analysis sheet is predicting that the bank account should then be circa £30000. There was approval of this initial draft of our accounts.

### 5. Financial Report For The Year To Date

PJ had previously emailed round to Board Members an a copy of the up-to-date draft budget along with a file called "Payments Cash Book 2020-21 V2". This second file which projects (to our year-end) further anticipated expenditure and another refund from SWRFT of unspent monies is predicting a resultant bank balance of circa £30000.

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

1. BW pointed out that the Organic Sea Harvest (OSH) appeal to the DPEA regarding their Flodigarry fish farm application (that was refused by Highland Council (HC)) was also dismissed by the DPEA Reporter. OSH will probably appeal this to the Quarter Session. Although this fish farm is on Skye, with it being directly opposite to our area we will need to keep our eye on this as it will affect the fish from our rivers.
2. The Scottish Salmon Companies (SSC) appeal to the DPEA over their Aird application has been allowed. In his decision notice the Reporter has set a condition for an EMP to be agreed by HC following consultation with both Marine Scotland Science (MSS) and WRASFB. Following a discussion with SB, BW proposed that we should set up a meeting with MSS having BW, PJ, SB and David Morris (MSS) to establish just what MSS's view is on this. And this should happen before we have any meeting with HC on this issue. What we do not want is for SSC and HC to get together and come up with a proposal that they put to MSS and ourselves. We need to be in from the start to ensure that any proposals are driven by MSS and WRASFB.
3. In a similar approach BW proposed that we should have a similar meeting with HC planners involving Mark Harvey (HC), BW, SB, PJ and Polly Burns PB is the FMS Aquaculture Interactions Manager who has been involved in Argyll where her FMS response to the Carradale application was as robust as anything we would have submitted. This meeting would focus on Loch Ewe and this potential Mowi application for a Neptune semi-closed containment unit to go into Loch Ewe - see point 5 below.
4. Not a great deal is happening in the north of our area, Scottish Sea Farms (SSF) have decided that they will put in an application for a fish farm at Horse Island but first want to talk with the Coigach Community who are split in two. The Coigach Community Council is against this application whilst the Coigach Development Company appears to be in favour of this development. WRASFB will be objecting to the planning application on the basis that it is situated right in the path of a migration route of salmon from Kannaird, Loch Broom and Little Loch Broom. Because this fish farm is not in planning stage yet, SSF have so far not produced a sea lice dispersal model. MSS's wording of the minimum criteria for incoming planning applications is not precise enough as it states that applications "should be accompanied by a sea lice dispersal model". SSF have said that they will supply the sea lice dispersal model once they get planning permission. In which case, this issue will be a focus of our objection proposing that HC cannot make an informed decision without a sea lice dispersal model for the proposed fish farm. RN said that surely they must put in the modelling with their application in order for HC to be able to make an informed decision. BW said that in his view SSF will have such a model already but are sitting on it because its effects may not look good. So, along with all the other issues that WRASFB uses in its responses, this issue of the sea lice dispersal model needs to be the main crux of our response to the planning application when it is submitted. BW said that we should get Peter C to produce our version of a sea lice model based on his best estimate/knowledge for this proposed fish farm so that in the absence of a model from SSF we could produce our version for HC's decision process.
5. Loch Ewe fish Farm - BW said that the Board will be objecting to this "Neptune" application if / when it is submitted as it was always our view that the closure of the Isle of Ewe fish farm heralded in an "Aquaculture Free Zone" for Loch Ewe.

This would tie in with any management project for Loch Maree - since the whole point was to have no fish farm in Loch Ewe. In their four press releases regarding their intended trialling of these semi-closed units Mowi only name Loch Ewe as a site for one of these units - provocative? HW did ask BW (by email) if these trialling of Neptune units was ever discussed at any meeting about the closure of the Isle of Ewe fish farm. BW response then was, and is now reiterated to avoid any misunderstanding, that nothing of this sort was discussed at all. Essentially all discussion at these meetings was about the closure of the Isle of Ewe fish farm. This Mowi intention of putting a Neptune unit in Loch Ewe has come "out of the blue" to the board and we have so little information regarding these units. In fact the only data that we can find about these units is from the Mowi web site and a brief description of the unit on the manufacturer's web site. For that reason, Peter Cunningham is now tasked with finding as much information about these units as he possibly can. BW went on to point out that this unit needs to be sited where there is a depth of at least 50 metres of water below the surface. This depth is required so that sea water can be pumped in from that depth and so avoid all strata of water that carry sea lice and plankton. Faeces and waste food exit the unit through a "funnel" construction at the bottom of the tank and are either deposited directly onto the seabed or can be pumped away (into a well-boat?). But we don't know which of these options will be used. RN asked if Mowi are going to hang onto the existing lease for the Neptune unit to go there. BW replied that the water depth at the current site is only 35 metres so he believes that Mowi are not stupid enough to use the Isle Ewe site for Neptune. Rather they want to relinquish the lease for the Isle Ewe site and by offering the lease to the board no other fish farm could come in and use that site. The Isle Ewe site has failed benthic impacts results so often that it is unlikely that any other fish farm would wish to operate there. What we should now do is look at the charts for Loch Ewe to see just where Mowi could put the Neptune unit with at least 50 metres of water below the surface. Once we have an idea as to the possible location of this unit we should then consider how we can encourage SNH to object to this on landscapes issues. The other constraint of this Neptune unit is that it needs to be sited where the waves are never more than one metre high. It is a solid shell that will not "flex" as open pen fish farms do. RN asked can we approach Crown Estates (CE) to see if they would "donate" the lease to WRASFB. Back in 2017 BW had a conversation with Alex Adrian regarding the take over of the Isle of Ewe lease by WRASFB with no rent being charged but there is a fear by CE that this might set a precedent for other pressure groups taking out leases with little or no rent with the sole intention of stopping aquaculture operating in those areas. We can re-approach CE because BW is convinced that Alex Adrian believed the close of the Isle Ewe fish farm would herald an aquaculture free zone in Loch Ewe. At the same time, Mowi may well be trying to prove a point that their open pen fish farm was not the main cause of sea lice infestation and that they did not cause the demise of the Loch Maree sea trout. We need to decide on a strategy for our approach to ensuring that an aquaculture free zone is indeed the outcome of the closure of the Isle Ewe fish farm. What we need now is Board approval for meetings on this issue to be arranged involving HC, CE, MSS, BW, SB, PJ and PB (FMS). In the first instance we (BW, SB, PJ) should meet up with HC to understand their views on this issue and then a meeting with Alex Adrian to see/hear what they are thinking so that we can address their thoughts somehow. The alternative is just sitting and waiting on for the likes of Mowi and SSC to get their view/points in to HC first. We need Board approval to conduct these discussions though no decisions will be made until we report back to the Board in

a Board conference situation. At this moment we do not need to wonder about what Mowi are thinking but we do need to know exactly what these other entities are thinking on this issue. So rather than just the WRASFB telling Mowi our thoughts on their intention for Loch Maree, by approaching these other entities first, there could be a joint voice asking Mowi "just what are you playing at?" RN thought that this strategy was the way forward and RD said that he was very annoyed with Mowi's attitude. GC said that close containment did not have shades of grey in its meaning - it is either close containment or it is not and that this unit was definitely not close containment so we should oppose it utterly – RN agreed with this. We need to get the background information so that we can oppose this using the best criteria possible. Back at the time of the RECC consultation Mowi stated that they were going for high-energy open water sites for their next phase of fish farms. In reality these high-energy open water sites have proved to be difficult to manage with large numbers of escapes and may well now be viewed as a poor idea by Mowi. This Neptune technology now appears to be their possible method of getting back into sheltered waters with this so-called close containment systems. For years now every wild fish interest has been calling for close containment so this may well prove to be a test - for how do we object to this technology when for years wild fish interests have been calling for close containment.

This unit will be stocked with smolts of around 150 grams and will take them up to 800 grams when they will then be moved into open pen cages for the remainder of their growth. For Mowi this may mean that they can cut the time these 800 grams fish spend in an open cage environment down to one year. But that might also mean that these open cages using this growing system may only ever have second year cycles and we know that second year cycles mean high sea lice problems. Also where Mowi are in the same areas as other aquaculture companies how will production synchronisation be possible?

RD suggested that these strategy thoughts be put round the Board by email. BW said that an email would be put to the Board regarding our forward strategy but that we should not now be posing questions to Mowi and thereby giving Mowi a "heads up" on our current thinking on this issue. At this point we went round the room to get thoughts from all attending the meeting. NM was in agreement that we should try to keep the pressure on Mowi without showing our hand to them, RN also agreed, as did GC and RD.

PC joined the meeting.

HW had asked by email how much money Mowi would save by keeping the Isle Ewe lease and not operating as a fish farm there. It will actually cost them more money and BW explained that CE fish farm leases are costed on biomass produced over a 2-year production cycle. The charge rate per kilogram is set each year and applied to the year immediately following a complete production cycle. If no fish are stocked into a fish farm the lease rent is increased by 25% in order to discourage leases being taken out by entities that might try to exclude other fish farmers from using that site. So, signing over the lease to the Board will actually cost Mowi more money and that poses the question of why then would they wish to do that? It could be that with lease still being effectively stopping any other fish farm from taking over the lease (if it was surrendered instead of signed over) and operating a fish farm at that site. But with all the history of failed benthic impact surveys, would any operator wish to attempt fish farming there? RD said that did make sense but that he was always suspicious of Mowi intentions. BW agreed saying that Mowi had used the fact that they had sent a letter to the Board informing us of their intentions regarding closure of Isle Ewe and the Neptune

introduction into Loch Ewe as “opening discussions with the WRASFB”. On that issue we need to stop Mowi in their tracks and to do this with maximum effect we must speak first with CE, MSS and HC. If we don’t speak with these entities first we will be “out on a limb” and not speaking from any position of force or knowledge. We do need to get this background information of where Mowi could possibly site the Neptune unit within Loch Ewe so that we can speak with the some authority as to their intended siting of Neptune once they announce it. RD asked if BW had had a chance to look at the chart of Loch Ewe (that RD had given to BW) for a suitable site. BW said that there were seven points marked on it - all for open pen sites - but from memory there were no depth markings on the chart. So there is quite a bit of “homework” to be done researching just where in Loch Ewe this Neptune unit could be sited. RD said that we need to do as much research as we can and as soon as we can prior to engaging with Mowi over their plans for this unit in Loch Ewe.

## **7. Community Relations - Education and Young Fishers’ Projects**

There was no report available this year as there has been no Education of Young Fishers’ projects this year.

## **8. Anglers’ Representative’s Report**

Ala has offered his apologies for non-attendance of this meeting, confirmed that he has no report from anglers for this year which is not surprising given the effect the Covid-19 restrictions have had on angling generally.

## **9. AOCB**

- PJ gave a report about the new WRFT saying that an on-line registration at OSCR had taken place and a subsequent telephone call with someone in the OSCR compliance section had confirmed the acceptance of the submission into the OSCR system. The application for the new WRFT “tied” this new entity back to the original WRFT, making he point that it will be continuing the work of the former WRFT and had similar, if not the same, objectives. From my précis to him, he indicated that it should be considered a “low risk” charity (with objectives that are evidently achievable and with no trustees being paid) and that the timescale for their decision should be early in the New Year. Once OSCR approve the new WRFT as a charity, it is then a matter of taking the Articles (now approved by OSCR) and submitting them to Companies House along with an application for registration as a Company Limited by Guarantee. Then it would be a case of keeping in mind the points that GC made in our last meeting - we should look at the new WRFT and the Board sharing facilities and even personnel (same person as administrator of WRFT and clerk to the Board) so that costs are kept manageable. This can be achieved and should be a priority status so that it will be achieved. RN asked if trustees of the former WRFT will come onto the new WRFT Board. PJ replied that three trustees of the former WRFT (who were still trustees of SWRFT) are on the initial four trustees setting up the new Trust, The fourth trustee is Dr Steve Kett (SK) a lecturer at Middlesex University. SK has brought students up from Middlesex University who have performed considerable amounts of work over many years on Loch Maree identifying the genetics

of the trout and sea trout of Loch Maree. This work on genetics has shown that the various tributaries running into the loch have their own genetic family of trout. MSS are currently against “industrial sized” hatcheries being granted licenses for the stocking of rivers. But surprising MSS did say that they could “get behind” the idea of a number of small hatcheries that are attempting to keep the progeny of a number of individual genetic families of trout and sea trout in Loch Maree alive and well. Something for the future, no doubt. So he is a valuable asset as a second “biologist” of the trust.

- Catch Returns - PJ reminded the meeting that the Board does need catch returns from all proprietors and that the easiest way of doing this is to copy the form that is submitted to MSS and forward a copy of that form to the Board.

## **10. Date of Next Meeting**

We will deal with the setting of the date for our next meeting by email.