

MINUTES OF WRASFB BOARD MEETING

By Conference Call	PRESENT:	
DATE: 30 March 2020	Stephen Bate (SB)	Neil Morrison (NM)
OPENED AT: 11.00 CLOSED AT: 12.15	Gordon Crawford (GC)	Rosie Nicoll (RN)
IN ATTENDANCE: Peter Jarosz (PJ)	Donald Rice (DR)	Ray Dingwall (RD)
	Stuart Allison (SA)	
	APOLOGIES:	
	Hugh Whittle (HW)	Ala Mackenzie (AM)
	Bill Whyte (BW) Chair	

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Bill Whyte, Hugh Whittle and Ala Mackenzie. With BW being absent PJ acted as chair for the meeting.

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

The minutes of the 11th November 2019 were accepted as an accurate record of the meeting being proposed by RN and seconded by GC.

3. Matters Arising

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

4. Initial Draft 2019-20 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 (following final tranche payment for 2019-20 to the Trust) that the bank account should then be £5600. There was approval of this initial draft of our accounts. This moves us onto discussing the draft budget.

5. Draft 2020-21 Budget and Levy Setting

PJ had previously sent the draft budget to HW (the Board's Treasurer) and during a subsequent telephone discussion with Hugh it was suggested that the Board should consider that, due the impact that the Covid-19 lockdown is having, and would continue to have for some time, on the finances of commercially run fisheries, the levy should not be 90p in the pound and HW proposed that it be halved to 45p in the pound. In two subsequent telephone conversations with firstly SB and then later GC the suggestion was to raise an initial levy invoice at 45p in the pound which would be sent out with an accompanying letter that explained the considerations that had resulted in this rate being charged initially. The letter will also state that the Board will review the situation later in the year (post June at least) with the option of then considering raising a second levy invoice – depending on the timing of the relaxation of the lockdown that would allow fishing to recommence. This now brings us the actual proposal for the budget of which you all have a copy. The anticipated expenditure for the coming year is written into this budget in full with the exception of all payments to the Trust and with only the amounts of initial levy invoices income being input (i.e. we do not issue a second levy invoice) the anticipated balance at the end of this year is likely to be around £7700. SB mentioned that the fact that the Trust is unlikely to be doing any work for a number of months was a

significant consideration in proposing this budget. PJ said that he has since been informed that Peter Cunningham will be furloughed (on the government Covid-19 scheme) until the end of June at least – meaning that he will not be allowed to work during that period. We will need to check out if the Board can ask Peter C to do any work for planning applications while he is on furlough. Action: PJ will draft a letter to proprietors (that will accompany the levy invoices) and email it to SB who will check out the wording and alter where he thinks necessary.

6. Update on Aquaculture Events since the last Board Meeting

1. PJ reported that there are two very recent cases that need to be dealt with immediately. The first one is the appeal to the DPEA by the Scottish Salmon Company (SSC) over the refusal by the Highland Council of the planning application for any increase of biomass at their North Aird site. This has been ongoing for some time now but very recently the reporter assigned to this appeal has requested further information from the Board. Should the reporter grant this application with a condition of an agreed EMP being in place and it is the terms of the EMP that are particularly important and the wording of the EMP is up for input response at this time. This response from the Board will need to be prioritised.
2. Organic Sea Harvest (OSH) have recently had a planning application for two fish farm sites on Skye refused by the Highland Council and OSH have subsequently appealed this refusal to the DPEA. The Board submitted a response to the original planning application on the grounds that sea lice from these farms could and probably would disperse in the direction of our area (in particular to Loch Gairloch and Loch Ewe). So because of our response to the original planning application, we have now been asked to respond to the appeal case being heard by a reporter. SB pointed out that the planning application was refused on the grounds of the objection to these fish farms by SNH, so our response to DPEA is likely to reiterate the points we made in our response to the original planning application.
3. Finally Scottish Sea Farms (SSF) are planning to get a new site at Horse Island up and running because of their intention to vacate their Tanera sites. Last September BW and PJ met up in Ullapool with SSF regarding this particular site during which we asked SSF when we could see their sea lice dispersal model. Though it was not ready for this meeting we were promised to get sight of it as soon as it was available which should be any time now. There was a request for a further meeting on the issue of this site but currently this is unlikely to occur soon. We could probably use the lockdown as a time advantage for not being able to meet up with them to progress this any further. But we will have to respond as this site will undoubtedly affect the river Kannaird and as likely the river Ullapool.

7. Loch Maree Monitoring Project

With the closure of the Isle of Ewe fish farm later this year, there is a unique opportunity for a monitoring project on Loch Maree probably over four/five years to scientifically record just what changes/effect the closure of the fish farm may have on the stocks of sea trout and salmon within the Loch Maree catchment area. The SWRFT biologist (Peter Cunningham) produced a six bullet point agenda that he considered should be the essential elements that should be incorporated in such a monitoring project. PJ then talked through the six points that PC had made. This will be a large and therefore costly project and Board members need to be aware that one possible source of monies for this project is from aquaculture (specifically from Mowi) through a newly formed funding source (that will have a £300K annual budget). Both RN and RD thought that monies

from aquaculture was not an acceptable source of funding for this project. RD said that Mowi should spend money to clean up the “mess” from beneath the Isle of Ewe fish farm. SB suggested that this project should be led by the Loch Maree proprietors since, without their buy in, this project is a non-starter. They should decide on the project’s importance and decide where the funding for it should come from. RN said that a letter round the Loch Maree proprietors would be the start for the project’s consideration by them. RD mentioned that at the previous Board meeting Ian Lindsay (SWRFT chair) had talked about the possibility of this project being a much larger scientific piece of research involving much larger amounts of funding (probably £1M+) for which there would need to be a certain entity in place that would be legally responsible for the delivery of the project and for the accounting of the monies spent. In response to IL’s vision of the project, RN said that PJ had suggested that we ask PC to suggest what he considered to be the elements that needed to be in a monitoring project for Loch Maree and that what had been presented were PC’s recommendations and that these formed a more realistic approach to the monitoring project. PJ said that, following the Board’s last meeting in October, there had been an intention to call a meeting of the Loch Maree/Loch Ewe proprietors but that, with the onset of the Covid-19 lockdown, this was not an option for the immediate future. PJ precised the discussion on this item as that the meeting thought that there is a project (around these six bullet points from PC) that would give us most important data and that it is more of a question of who pays for it / how is it funded. RN suggested that monies from aquaculture clearly called “reparation” money might be an acceptable way for accepting aquaculture as a source of funding for this project. RN said that all of PC’s points are good ones and should be done but we do need to fund them. SB summarised the discussion as – significantly more money would be needed (with Mowi not seeming to be an option) so it would appear that the Loch Maree proprietors get together among themselves and appoint someone from their number to approach possible sources of funding and for the project to be driven in that way. And the Board could help in this process and in the delivery of the project. DR said that he had the same reaction as RN about offers of funding from Mowi but the reality is that funding is, and will continue to be, extremely difficult to find. And importantly, in the long term, if the science from this project is going to show that the ecosystem has robustly bounced back (which it may or may not do so) no one will remember Mowi doing PR presentation about helping to fund this project but they will remember the scientific data that showed how much the fish farm did affect the sea trout stocks of Loch Maree. DR stressed his two points as being that 1) funding is extremely difficult to find at this time and that 2) the science from this project is too important to “let slip through our fingers”. PJ mentioned that one thought regarding the second bullet point was that we could approach the Loch Maree Hotel and offer to pay their levy invoice in exchange for taking over their boats so that we can accurately record fishing effort as well as the fish catch figures. That way fishing from these boats becomes part of a scientific study. RN said that, with the use of a standard record sheet, similar recording of actual time spent fishing along with fish catches could also apply to the other boats fishing on the loch. There was a consensus that a letter round to the Loch Maree catchment area proprietors would be a sensible way forward.

8. Little Loch Broom Project

A few months ago the SWRFT were approached by Wester Ross Fisheries Ltd (WRF) offering to fund a monitoring project in Little Loch Broom (LLB). One obvious method of monitoring in LLB is the use of a fyke net which, as well as the costs for its “manning”, could be paid for by WRF. To date no-one has been back to them so PJ asked what DR and GC thought of this approach from WRF. DR said that a fyke net has been employed

in LLB over a number of years now – the data from which had been generally “rubbished” by WRF so we should be aware that this approach may be more for their PR than for science. But we need to enquire further from WRF as to the amount of finance they are offering as well as what exactly they see as potential outcomes from such a project. DR said that additionally there is a lot of local science with the use of underwater cameras going on in LLB from which some really good results are being achieved. GC also agreed with DR that this approach from WRF was completely out of character and that we need to obtain from them a written proposal of what they are looking to do, what they are looking to fund, what help they need from the Board and what they hope will be achieved by this. Action: contact WRF requesting this written proposal.

9. Response to DPEA re North Aird

This item is dealt with under item 6 bullet point 1.

10. Response to Organic Sea Harvest Appeal

This item is dealt with under item 6 bullet point 2.

11. AOCB

- **River Categorization**

PJ mentioned that the river categorizations for this year have been recently circulated and that there are two rivers in the Board’s area that have Category One status. But does the Board consider that our recommendation to all proprietors be “catch and release” on all our rivers rather than these two rivers following their river categorization options? GC said that the policy on his rivers was “catch and release” even prior to the advent of river categorization. SA said that guests coming up to Wester Ross fully expected to put all caught fish back into the river in fact the older fishermen who have witnessed the decline of fish numbers are happy to put all fish caught back into the river as their effort to sustain stocks. RD also agreed that “catch and release” was the rule on the Ewe and that he thought it should continue as did RN. NM asked if the Board should also recommend the use of barbless hooks – SB said the Board should not recommend the use of barbless hooks but simply point out that barbless hooks can produce less damage to the fish. The consensus then was that the Board should recommend that “catch and release” be the practice on all rivers in our area.

- RD pointed out that the Board needs to obtain from all proprietors the contract rules that they issue to their fishing clients so that, should a bailiff be called out to a situation of someone catching and retaining a fish on a river, there is no possible ambiguity to the situation the bailiff has been called to officiate.

- **Piscivorous Ducks**

PJ reported that 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.

12. Date of Next Meeting

Normally we would be looking for a date later in the year but in these unprecedented times we may have to call a similar (to today’s) meeting following the relaxation of lockdown to decide just what the Board may wish to do about a possible second levy invoice for this year.