

MINUTES OF WRASFB BOARD MEETING

By Conference Call	PRESENT:	
DATE: 26 May 2021	Neil Morrison (NM) Gordon Crawford (GC) Hugh Whittle (HW)	Stephen Bate (SB) Rosie Nicoll (RN)
OPENED AT: 10.30 CLOSED AT: 12.15	APOLOGIES:	
IN ATTENDANCE: Peter Jarosz (PJ) Peter Cunningham (PC)	Bill Whyte (BW) Donald Rice (DR) Ala Mackenzie (AM)	Ray Dingwall (RD) Stuart Allison (SA)

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Bill Whyte, Raymond Dingwall, Donald Rice, Stuart Allison and Ala Mackenzie.

2. Approval of the minutes/notes of the 17th November 2020 Meeting

See below for approval.

3. Matters Arising

RN said that she had endorsed the Board's position/stance regarding the possibility of a planning application for a Neptune unit being deployed in Loch Ewe sometime in the future. The minutes therefore needed to be amended to include this.

4. Report on 2020-21 Accounts

PJ had prepared the records of the WRASFB's accounts for 2020-21 and these have been sent to our accountants on 18th May 2021.

5. Draft 2021-22 Budget and Levy Setting

PJ had previously emailed round to Board Members a copy of the up-to-date draft budget along with a file called "Budget Proposal HW". This second file (from HW) uses a levy rate of 70p in the pound.

PJ reported that he had had a telephone conversation with HW yesterday about budgets and levy rate. Both HW and PJ were concerned about the need to control costs for this year. To that end PJ had committed to his salary being "ceiling" at 6K. He reported that he had made a similar commitment with WRFT because he was equally concerned about controlling costs at the Trust. SB asked whether the 10K (as shown in the second file) would fund PC for 3 days a week that he believed the Board would require. PJ said that 16K was the budget for PC's salary for a 3 day week and that was without NI and pension contributions. PC joined the meeting at this point and in answer to SB question of how many days will the Trust need to work to carry out the work for the Board. PC said he believed that the Board's work amounted to 3 days a week. There may well be another year of National Electro-fishing Programme (NEP) and this is in addition to the juvenile fish sampling that the Board requires - so the Board gets extra data that it doesn't pay for. PJ said hopefully there will be money for the NEP from MSS and the sweep-netting programme from ScotGov via FMS. HW asked if the Trust was going to receive funding from Atlantic Salmon Trust (AST). PC explained the involvement of the Trust in this project. PJ pointed out that the Trust has already carried out the work for this project and the funding is now spent. HW said that proprietors have had a year of virtually no income from fishing for last year and, to date, the current year will also be a

loss maker. So this year is for “tightening the belt” and managing, and where possible, reducing costs. RN agreed with HW’s appraisal of the financial situation. SB asked about a figure in the budget for rent of the office. PJ explained that although Duncan Mackenzie had talked about putting a rent on the office, to date nothing had been agreed. So the figure for rent is in both budgets as a safety net in case a rent is asked for. RN asked whether 10K would cover the costs of 3 days of work for the Board. SB said where we had got to was that 10K along with the other, as yet to be confirmed funding, would cover the costs of 3 days of work for the Board. RN said that it was therefore a balance of not wanting to lose PC and making the levy rate realistic for proprietors. PJ Mentioned item 9 on the agenda saying that there is a project put together by the Trust for funding from Foundation Scotland that if successful will deliver the additional work that the Board requires. RN said that she would support the proposal for a levy at 70p in the pound with the proviso that we can come back later should we need to revisit the financial position - with the Trust in mind. GC and SB also agreed with the proposal of 70p in the pound for the levy. PJ reported that the outstanding levis of 472.00 have been further reduced by payments from the Loch Maree Hotel and Douglas Beck which leaves just 67.00 outstanding from Mark Raeside.

PJ said that he would send out this year’s levy invoices towards the end of the month or early in June.

6. Update on Aquaculture Events since the last Board Meeting - see 7,9 and 10

SB gave a précised update on the Loch Torridon EMP situation.....

7. Loch Torridon EMP

See item 6 above.

8. WRFT Biologist

Peter Cunningham then gave a presentation using screen share.

9. Foundation Scotland funding

PJ said that from the because of the sea lice figures (that PC had just shown in his presentation and that are already up on the WRFT web site) that were so bad, PC had expressed a wish to do additional work in order to fully understand the severity of the sea lice problem. To that end a project has been fleshed out and costed for submission to Foundation Scotland who are a funding source through which SSPO money is currently being channelled to wild fish charities that submit applications that are then approved. In order to avoid any possible “gagging” (as described by HW) that application makes it quite clear that all resultant data will be displayed on the WRFT website. That way Foundation Scotland will either accept that scenario or refuse to fund the application. What they won’t be able to do is to somehow restrict the data outcome of the project. And it should be noted that this proposed project is a WRFT entity.

10. Landcatch Natural Selection Ltd

This next item is quite interesting particularly if you believe in coincidences. I recently received a ‘phone call from Dr Alastair Steven of SSE during which he asked me if the WRASFB was aware of any planning applications for work at the Landcatch Natural Selection hatcheries at the mouth of the River Kerry. When I told him that we were not

aware of anything in that connection he informed me that a friend of his had photographed extensive construction work already under way at the site. Alastair then sent me the photos and I duly sent them with an email to Mark Harvey (MH) asking him if HC were aware of this work. MH came back immediately stating that HC were unaware of this work and that no planning application had been submitted to HC for this work. I then inform NatureScot about the work in case there could be any impact on the fresh water pearl mussels in the River Kerry.

Within days of informing MH of this construction I received an email from the CEO of Landcatch Natural Selection suggesting a meeting to explore if Landcatch could offer any expertise help to any fisheries in the WRASFB area in particular for stocking of any rivers within the Board area. Although we cannot currently stock rivers without permission from MS - and which is not forthcoming at this time - I did believe that I should meet up with him and see just what might come out of such a meeting. I did chat with Alan Wells (FMS) to get his view on meeting up with the CEO of Landcatch and AW thought that I should meet up with Mr Jarl van den Berg. So I will be arranging a meet up with him and will report back later.

11. WRF Ltd and the Rhidorroch River

WRF Ltd have been in contact with at least two proprietors within the north of our area offering to help them put together any habitat projects that the proprietor might wish to pursue. They have developed a concept on the upper Rhidorroch river into a project that has the endorsement of the proprietor. This section of the river is not fished and suffers major bank erosion from large amounts of sediment being washed down during large spates. We went up there yesterday and it is a big project. Having seen the extent of the bank erosion yesterday, PC's view is that we should be extremely careful of doing anything until a full survey of the upper catchment area has been conducted - thereby identifying the source of the sediment that is being washed down the river. PC's opinion is that the problems in the upper catchment area need to be solved first before any work on riverbank stabilisation should be done. So from the on site visit of yesterday, the view is that we limit the project to a survey of the upper catchment area and then, depending on what is discovered, we next put together a second project of work to stabilise the wash out situation.

12. AOCB

PJ has added an item here because the Board recently received an email from an entity called Northland Power. Northland Power are a Canadian registered company and they have ambitions to do offshore wind farms in this area. Their CEO Benedicte Bergeaud has suggested a meeting to discuss the intentions of Northland Power. It would be helpful if a member of the Board would join this meeting. Any work on wind farms in an area of proximity to the West Coast Tracking project is a "no go" and we would need to make them aware of that should the intended wind farm work be in such an area then the WRASFB would oppose such work at this time. Nevertheless it would be useful to hear just what are their plans for off-shore wind farms in this area. GC thought that we should engage with these people if only to find out early just what are their plans and therefore try to stop any plans that we consider a problem to migrating fish. GC also believed that it was extremely unlikely that they would receive permission for wind farms just off our coast. HW said that he is aware that off the coast of Argyle there are embryonic plans for a new wind farm some three miles out that will use these latest turbines that are huge. The money that is being offered to local communities is vast and this is one of the main dangers of these projects. GC also pointed out that wind farms in general and offshore wind farms in particular are a key entity in the SNP's plans going forward.

HW asked if the Board had been in contact with Highland Council, Crown Estate or Mowi regarding the Mowi “proposal” of situating a so-called close containment unit in Loch Ewe. PJ replied that the Board had not been in contact with all three on this subject. PJ had looked on an admiralty chart for Loch Ewe to see what the depth of water was throughout Loch Ewe as this unit has to be in water of a low tide depth of 50m. A look at the chart showed that there were very few places in Loch Ewe that such a unit could go and most of these few places were in what might be referred to as “naval channels” for incoming ships that do use them at the time of military exercises. Highland Council do not know anything further on this issue and we do not know whether or not Crown Estate intend to “draw in” the lease on the existing old site. It is probably unlikely because, as we previously discussed, the chances of any other operator wanting to put a finfish farm on the site of the now empty Mowi fish farm site are remote, to say the least, as the site has failed three benthic impacts on the “trot”.

13. Date of Next Meeting

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