

MINUTES OF ANNUAL PROPRIETORS & WRASFB BOARD MEETING

By Conference Call		PRESENT:	
DATE: 06 May 2022		Neil Wright (NW)	Stephen Bate (SB)
OPENED AT:13.30 CLOSED AT:15.15		Rosie Nicoll (RN)	Donald Rice (DR)
IN ATTENDANCE:		Andrew D Barclay (ADB)	
Peter Jarosz (PJ)	Peter Cunningham (PC)	APOLOGIES: Gordon Crawford (GC)	
		Stuart Allison (SA)	

1. Apologies

2. Approval of the minutes of the 7th December 2021 Meeting

The minutes had been previously dealt with by email - they were proposed by NW and seconded by DR.

3. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising that hadn't previously been dealt with by email.

4. Co-opting of the Anglers' Representative

ADB introduced himself with a précis of his fishing preferences being for trout. PJ asked those present to formally adopt ADB as the new Angler's Representative. All present voted for ADB adoption as the new Angler's Representative.

5. Appointment of a Convener

PJ reported that there has been one candidate for convener and that is SB. SB has put himself forward on the basis of the regional management arrangement as proposed in our December 2021 meeting. These regions are "North", "Central" and "South" and the appropriate proprietors from each region are the first point of contact for anything arising in their respective region. Once considered by the regional proprietors any issue is then put back to the Board for the Board's decision. SB pointed out that he was not be proposing to be a chief executive officer (CEO), by performing the role of convener, with the main reason being that he is not based locally. This appointment was voted in unanimously and the area-based approach to Board action was approved: see 9 below.

6. Report on 2021-22 Accounts

PJ previously emailed round two documents - one shows the actual costs incurred for the f/y 2021-22. Because of the unprecedented cost of electricity our year-end figure is 2,700.00 lower than the estimate that was provided back in December 2021. However, PJ reported that he has managed to switch the electricity provider from Corona Energy to Octopus and the account is now with WRFT so you will note that there are no costs for electricity included in our 2022-23 budget. There will be one final retrospective payment due to Corona Energy but no further costs for electricity in the current f/y. The other estimated figures are accurately reflected by the actual year-end figures. There is an amount of 6096.00 in the year-end figures and that is for the cost of the QC. The QC's invoices have been paid by Fish Legal and we await the re-invoicing from Fish Legal for payment of this amount.

7. Draft 2022-23 Budget and Levy Setting

The other document previously emailed round the Board was the budget. The figures for next year are based on the actual costs of this past year including the payment of the QC's fees and, should the levy be staying at 70p in the pound, there is still a healthy projected year-end surplus. There are still a number of outstanding 2021-22 levy invoices amounting to just over £1,000.00 and these will be sent out to the appropriate proprietors with the 2022-23 levy invoices along with a statement. SB noted that the "surplus" for this coming year was above the accepted 10,000.00 contingency fund and asked if there were plans for this additional surplus.

PJ pointed out that there was no money this year for the National Electro-fishing Programme and it would be prudent for the Board to consider allocating some funds for electro-fishing the rivers in the Board area to ensure that the database of juvenile fish numbers is kept up to date. SB said that there is an onus on the Board to use the catch data to prepare a report about the health of the salmon stocks in our area - so PC can prepare this for the Board. PJ stated that the Board still does not get catch data from the majority of the proprietors despite reminders going out each year. As a direct result PC has to wait for the official figures being produced on the MS website and these are not necessarily in the format that he would prefer. NW pointed out that Boards have a "data agreement" with MSS under which Boards can request individual river catch data for their own use.

He also said that it would appear that MSS are now going back to putting river by river catch data on their web site instead of the "grouping" of figures that has been the trend for some time now. PJ confirmed that WRASFB has got that data agreement with MSS. PC said that with the regional grouping of the Board's area, as proposed in our last meeting, he would welcome opportunities to meet up with the proprietors of each region and discuss their rivers - this enables more detailed river information and possible proposals for improvement to be shared with proprietors of the rivers of each region without involving those proprietors of the other regions. SB asked if the board was "comfortable" with the generation of these figures of surplus based on the levy being at 70p in the pound or should the levy amount be revised? NW said that he was happy with the levy rate and the projected surplus because no decision on its spend needs to be made immediately and therefore it gave the Board flexibility to decide, anytime throughout the year, just how this surplus could be put to its best use.

DR stated that he was happy with the proposal for this surplus, commenting that he was also extremely grateful to SB for the work that he had done. PJ said that it is still possible that the Board has not yet finished with either further QC or higher legal costs as we will probably see in this next item for discussion. The Board then voted unanimously for the levy to stay at 70p in the pound for 2022-23.

8. Update on aquaculture events since the last meeting

SB préciséd the SEPA consultation for its proposed new regulatory regime for the granting of new fish farm consents. The Board had been to one of the SEPA consultation meetings and from the information given by SEPA in that meeting and with the very helpful input from Alan Wells and Charlotte Middleton (both of FMS) the Board had submitted a detailed response to the consultation process. One item of particular concern was SEPA's intentions of leaving existing fish farms with their current arrangements of EMPs to be "swept up" at some later date as yet unspecified.

- In Loch Torridon there are three farms all of which require EMPs (which have not yet been set) and the Highland Council (HC) appear to want a Loch Torridon area-wide set of EMPs. In the case of two of these farms the WRASFB needs to be consulted by the HC prior to the EMPs being approved by the HC. The Board has submitted a detailed

set of proposals for these EMPs. The Board (SB, GC and PJ) along with Robert Younger (Fish Legal) had a meeting with Mark Harvey (HC) that went reasonably well but we have yet to have even the schedule for a meeting with the aquaculture companies and HC. This meeting was a step proposed by HC very early on in this process following our representations. Despite a number of emails to HC regarding this step, this important meeting remains unscheduled.

Both Camas an Leim and Aird fish farms are in their first year of production (despite condition 1 of their respective consents being unfulfilled meaning they are in breach of their planning consents) and with the advent of year two of production the issue is becoming more urgent. PJ will email a letter to Mark Harvey (copying in the relevant heads of departments at HC) chronologically detailing one-way correspondences to Mark Harvey from the Board with, as yet, not responses. If this letter still does not receive a meaningful response, there needs to be a letter from Fish Legal sent to HC.

The two aquaculture companies have contracted Apem Ltd to do wild fish monitoring in Loch Torridon now that the farms are stocked and in production. Marine Scotland (MS) recently asked WRASFB if WRASFB would like to act as the consenting entity for the license application for the netting of salmonids by Apem Ltd. Alternatively the WRASFB could opt for MS to perform that task with input from WRASFB and WRFT. SB said that, with the Board's role in the Loch Torridon planning issue still very much ongoing, he would be more comfortable with reverting the decision process back to MS but with our input and that of WRFT. If the decision-making is passed to MS for this license, and the Board is still a consultee in this process, it does allow the Board's response to be robust and include suggested conditions such as the data from the monitoring must be available to both HC and WRASFB on an "as it happens" basis and not some time later and to have a wild fish representative there as the monitoring occurs. It was decided unanimously that we should put the decision-making for this license back to MS along with our response of conditions that the Board would prefer to be included in the licence.

The Board had requested a report regarding the meeting which took place on 15 December 2021 between Mowi and WRFT concerning Mowi's idea of brood-stock farming in Loch Ewe / Enard Bay. PJ said that he had circulated a report to Board members on 28 April 2022 of that meeting attended by himself and PC. During the meeting Mowi explained the type of unit that they wished to use for brood stock rearing and the procedure from the stripping of eggs through to the production of fry. PC and PJ attended in listening mode and came away from the meeting with the position of Mowi at that time.

9. Board's Management Protocol and Structure

A quick "recap" of what was suggested at our last meeting for the "management" of this Board emphasized that the Board's area should be notionally divided up into geographic sections - the northern, central and southern sections. The northern section would be the Broom, Little Loch Broom and associated waters areas, the central section would be the Ewe catchment (with Loch Maree and its many tributaries) and the southern to include the Torridon and other southern parts. Board members voted to accept this structure as the basis for the management of the Board's activities.

PJ asked for Board members to email into him their statements regarding their "conflict of interest". Once the emails have been acknowledged, PJ will print the emails and include them in our Conflict of Interest book. There is a standard template for recording conflict of interest and PJ will circulate this for Board members to use.

10. Loch Torridon EMP

This was dealt with under item 8 above.

11. WRFT Biologist

PC then gave his presentation in the form of a précis of a report document previously circulated by email to all board members. PC did say that last year the WRFT focus was on salmon and this year the concentration will be on sea trout.

12. AOCB

Within the past two weeks there have been a number of "rumours" circulating that:

a) WRF Ltd is up for sale

and

b) that Mowi appear to be the potential buyer.


A few weeks ago WRF Ltd used a local community council meeting as a forum for presenting their intention to re-apply for planning consent for Annat Bay. There was no change to the format that they had put forward back in 2005 when their application never progressed beyond an initial consultation meeting.

DR said that this resurrection of the Annat Bay issue had generated a substantial amount of local concern. SB said that the Board needs more information about this buy-out of WRF Ltd and we should therefore be asking Mowi directly exactly what their plans are. SB also pointed out that from Peter C's report there is a mention that James Merryweather had mobilised local support for opposition to three new fish farms going into the southern lochs of the Isle of Skye with the outcome being the refusal of planning consent. Would it be an idea to invite James Merryweather to give a short presentation to us by video? It would be prudent for the Board to have a strategic approach so that any points the Board may wish to make to counter any moves for further expansion of biomass in Loch Broom are both scientifically and strategically backed.

PC stated that he would like to see the inclusion of both salmon and sea trout as species for protection within the Wester Ross Marine Protected Area (MPA). He said that they were already protected in their fresh water environment with the Little Gruinard SAC and it made logical sense to extend that protection for them into the marine environment with the Wester Ross MPA. The case for this should be made to the Scottish Government (SG) for them to include these species into their Salmon Strategy as it does not yet include their implementation plan which will be produced over the coming year - so there is time for SG to include these two species into the protected species within the Wester Ross MPA. PJ said that he does have other reasons for contacting both Mowi and WRF Ltd and that he could use these two opportunities for get as much information from each of them regarding the sale of WRF Ltd and its intended further use by Mowi.

13. Date of Next Meeting

The date of our next meeting will be arranged by DoodlePoll.



Stephen Bate
Convener
07.09.2022