

MINUTES OF ANNUAL PROPRIETORS & WRASFB BOARD MEETING

By Conference Call	PRESENT: Neil Wright (NW) Gordon Crawford (GC) Donald Rice (DR)	Stephen Bate (SB) Rosie Nicoll (RN) Stuart Allison (SA)
DATE: 07 December 2021		
OPENED AT: 13.30 CLOSED AT: 15.15		
IN ATTENDANCE: Peter Jarosz (PJ) Peter Cunningham (PC)	APOLOGIES:	

1. Apologies

2. Approval of the minutes/notes of the 26th May 2021 Meeting

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

3. Matters Arising

No matters arising that hadn't previously been dealt with by email.

4. 2020-21 Accounts

The WRASFB's accounts for 2020-21 were completed by our accountant in August, distributed to all proprietors by email - there were no queries - and signed off by the convener of the previous Board on 2nd September 2021.

5. Financial report for the year to date

PJ reported that he had sent round a financial report and all elements are included in the budget in the file. There are a number of outstanding levels that PJ will follow up as soon as possible.

With the outstanding levies in and all expected expenditure also entered (including the fees of the QC – see below) the Board should end up with the projected figure of 16K which gives us our intended contingency fund of 10K as well as a surplus of 6K.

6. Update on Aquaculture Events since the last Board Meeting

PJ reported two interesting events over the weekend - one was the SEPA bulletin on media outputs that SEPA put out on the 3rd of November and that has been circulated to you all by email. PJ also reported that yesterday he had received an email from Clare Lumley-Holmes of Mowi saying that they were considering using the Neptune systems for brood-stock production and that one of these 2 units is currently intended for placement in a new location in Loch Ewe.

PJ had also checked with Alex Adrian at Crown Estate to see if a new lease has been taken out and in fact Crown Estate has received a "request" for a lease to be taken out in a new position in the Loch Ewe. The position of this unit is along the road coast approximately half way between the Nato refuelling base and Tournai Bay. A phone meeting has been proposed by Mowi to discuss this option with WRASFB but if anyone from the Board would like to be involved we can ask for a Zoom meeting. Currently the meeting is arranged for 15th December 2021. DR asked if we could ask PC what he considers the impact of this new unit might have in comparison to the fish farm that's just

gone. PC said that our main concern about fish farms is the sea lice that they produce and of course fish escapes. In this instance because the unit is semi-contained there should be minimal sea lice - if anything it is a matter then of escapes and maybe that also is a remoter possibility than from the open cage system.

What we need to find out is how the system circulates the water - does it pump water in from below the unit and from a reasonable depth and does it filter the water before pumping out the water? SB said that we should find out from Mowi what this unit is and does and get an independent view. SB proposed that PC should join PJ at the meeting. PC said that he would look at this unit from information on the Internet and also contact colleagues in Norway to see exactly what experience they have had with these units and how they operate once they are in use. PC shared his screen and showed a picture of these Neptune units in location in Norway and it was evident that they are a solid shell and water is pumped in and out through various holes in the unit. Interestingly Norway appears to be moving to bigger circumference cages and locating the farms further out to sea.

There followed a discussion on the recent SEPA proposals for the regulation of sea lice control in salmon aquaculture. SB said that the geographical areas of proposed control include parts of the board area- SEPA are looking for sea lice control on an area basis. What is proposed is an area lice load for each designated area, but it is not clear what the consequences of exceeding the lice load might be. Initially these new proposals will only cover new fish farm applications.

SB said that the time for responding to the SEPA consultation expires in March 2022.

SB gave a summary of the Loch Torridon fish farm applications and consents starting with a precis of how planning consents had changed over the past few years - in recent years there has been a move towards conditional planning consents requiring that an Environmental Management Plan (EMP) has to be put in place to address the potential damage through interactions with wild fish.

To date the EMPs that have been in place (which are outside the Board area) could be described as 'not having teeth' within them. In Loch Torridon there are two operators (Mowi and the Scottish Salmon Company) who have 3 operational farms (there is a fourth farm that has been "given up" in exchange for increased biomass on one of SSC's existing fish farms). These three farms are each subject to conditional consents requiring that EMPs be put in place and implemented.

The conditions attached to two of the three consents require that each EMP specifies a sea lice threshold and provides for biomass reduction if the sea lice threshold is exceeded. Consents for the two fish farms affected also stipulated that draft EMPs had to be submitted by the operators to the HC and that the HC was to set the terms of the EMPs following consultation with MSS and WRASFB. The EMPs are not yet in place.

Draft EMPs were produced by the two operators and then were discussed in a meeting (in March 2021) attended by SB, PJ, AW and representatives of the two operators. There followed another meeting when the WRASFB set out a summary of the approach it proposed for the required EMPs. The approaches of the Board and of the two operators were very different.

These conditions do seem to be unique as far as planning consents are concerned and offer the WRASFB an opportunity to get a meaningful outcome with regards to EMPs.

In November 2021, the WRASFB made written submissions to the HC, which were formulated following both internal Board discussion, external discussion with FMS and advice from Fish Legal and Leading Counsel. Those submissions included a very helpful opinion from FMS and an opinion from the QC that the draft EMPs put forward by SSC and Mowi do not comply with the planning conditions and the framework for the EMPs advanced by the Board is to be preferred.

The Clerk understands that the HC has informed both operators that their EMPs are not acceptable and is suggesting that a meeting be set up with the HC, WRASFB and both operators being present. WRASFB has agreed to such a meeting as a positive/sensible way forward. WRASFB has asked for a written response to the Board's proposals from both Mowi and SSC to be available prior to the meeting.

PJ said that apart from the Torridon case there had been little or no other aquaculture issues since our last Board meeting. There had been a hint that the Scottish Sea Farms may be considering an application submission for Horse Island but so far it had remained a hint. There has also been another "hint" from WRF Ltd regarding Annat Bay.

This is a site that was originally proposed back in 2005 at a pre-planning meeting organised and chaired by the HC with wild fish attendees and WRF Ltd at which an unusual proposal was put forward by WRF Ltd that, subject to approval, they would operate the farm for one complete cycle for salmon and then switch to cod production (as long as supplies of cod were available). This latest "resurrected" proposal for the site remains the same with one cycle of salmon followed by cod production should supplies of cod be available.

PC said that there is an Ullapool local council meeting in a couple of days time at which WRF Ltd will be given a time slot to outline this latest proposal. PC and DR intend to attend.

7. WRFT Biologist's Report

PC then gave his presentation using screen share and based on a document previously circulated by email to all proprietors.

8. Angler's Representative Report

There was no angler's representative present and there was no report for submission to the Board.

9. Board's Management Protocol and Structure - incl Treasurer and Cheque Signatory

SB provided an overview of how the previous Board was run - the convener was almost the equivalent of a chief executive and with the clerk did a lot of the work of the Board with the help of others. SB asked how members wish this Board to be run.

One way is to notionally divide the Board area up into geographic sections - say northern, central and southern sections. The northern section would be the Broom and associated waters areas, the central section would be the Ewe catchment (with Loch Maree and its many tributaries), and the southern section would be Torridon and other parts of the southern Board area. The Board members who are from within those particular areas would have the first initiative to address matters arising in their area. Although decisions would ultimately be made by the Board, the initial focus would be met at a local level. That way, decisions would be driven by the local areas "upwards". Information comes into the Board's "admin" email address, emails are then forwarded to all Board members and then decisions could be made as outlined above. There will be "global" matters that will be of concern to all areas and these general matters would be dealt with and decided on by the Board.

This model would mean that the role of the convener would carry out the responsibilities set out in the FMS guidance to boards; in particular, as a convener of meetings and to

ensure formal compliance with the statute in so far as the management of meetings, the minutes of meetings and decision-making at meetings. If this model is agreeable to the Board we should draw up the protocol for it, put the protocol round the Board so that all members could then have input into the document before it is finally signed off.

As well as this new model for how this Board may operate, one other matter is that with HW now stepping down from the Board we will need to appoint a treasurer and that person would also be the cheque signatory. The signing of cheques raises an issue as no-one lives locally so we will need to look at doing most, if not all, of our payments by internet banking. From what PJ has so far understood about BoS internet banking, it should be possible to ensure that two people have to sign off all payment transactions. RN said that she would be happy to be the treasurer and internet signatory - RN said that she is very familiar with this role from her own business point of view.

10. AOCB

PJ reminded those present to remember to let the Board have their catch returns for the year. PJ said that MS are now talking about making catch returns to them as an on-line system which means that as you make your on-line return to MS you would Cc admin@wrasfb.org.uk in.

One further item from SB was that we should ensure that meetings with external entities are recorded so that accurate "minutes" are then produced for the rest of the Board to read and consider.

DR said that the Sea Change group have received a substantial grant and now are recruiting for Marine Data Analysis - so please forward on this news to any interested parties. Their umbrella group is known as the Blue Hope Alliance and their web site is worth having a look at.

11. Date of Next Meeting

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



Stephen Bate
Convener
06.05.2022