

WRASFB ANNUAL REPORT 2024-25

Supported by the Fisheries Management Scotland (FMS) and Fish Legal



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Acronyms and Abbreviations

CAR	Controlled Activities Regulations
BS	Bakkafrost Scotland (formerly The Scottish Salmon Company)
CL	Conservation Limit
DPEA	Scottish Government – Planning and Environmental Appeals Division
DSFB	District Salmon Fishery Board
EISR	Environmental Information (Scotland) Regulations
EMP	Environmental Management Plan
FOI	Freedom of Information
FMO	Fisheries Management Organisation
FMS	Fisheries Management Scotland
IFM	Institute of Fisheries Management
INNS	Invasive Non Native Species
MPA	Marine Protected Area
MS	Mowi Scotland
MSS	Marine Scotland Science
MSW	Multi Sea Winter
NASCO	North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organisation
PAWC	Partnership Against Wildlife Crime
SAC	Special Area of Conservation
SEPA	Scottish Environment Protection Agency
SNH	Scottish Natural Heritage
SSSI	Site of Special Scientific Interest
THC	The Highland Council
WFR	Wild Fisheries Reform
WRFT	Wester Ross Fisheries Trust

The Board's Role

The Wester Ross Area Salmon Fishery Board (WRASFB / the Board) is a DSFB and as such is the statutory body responsible for the protection and enhancement of salmon and sea trout fisheries in its designated area. It was constituted under the Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries (Consolidation) (Act) Scotland 2003. Salmon fishing rights are private heritable titles that are registered separately from land and as such can be bought or sold like any other property.

DSFBs finance their work by applying a levy on the salmon fishery proprietors as directed under the 2003 Act. The 2003 Act states that "a district Board shall have the power to impose an assessment, to be known as the fishery assessment, on each salmon fishery in their district. The fishery assessment is assessed at such uniform rate as is determined for all fisheries in the district by the Board and, shall be levied according to the valuation of a fishery as entered into the valuation role". A DSFB may do such acts, execute such works and incur such expenses as may appear expedient for the protection or improvement of the fisheries within their district; The increase of salmon (and sea trout); or the stocking of the waters of the district with salmon (and sea trout).

Elected members of those salmon fishery owners (proprietors) form the core membership of the Board with representatives of salmon anglers and tenant netsmen being co-opted onto the Board as appropriate.

Board Members

Board members are elected triennially and the last election took place in November 2024. The elected members and co-opted Board members then elected one of their number as Convener. The current Board members are:

Upper Proprietors

Stephen Bate	Convener (River Balgy East bank)
Donald Rice	Mandatory for Regina Anna Properties (Dundonnell)
Rosie Nicoll	Kinlochewe
Phillipa Cliff	Mandatory for Philip Smith
Gordon Crawford	Mandatory for Nicholas Crawford (Eilean Darrach)

Lower Proprietors

Gordon Crawford	Mandatory for Nicholas Crawford (Eilean Darrach)
Rosie Nicoll	Kinlochewe

Co-optees

Richard Munday	Anglers' representative
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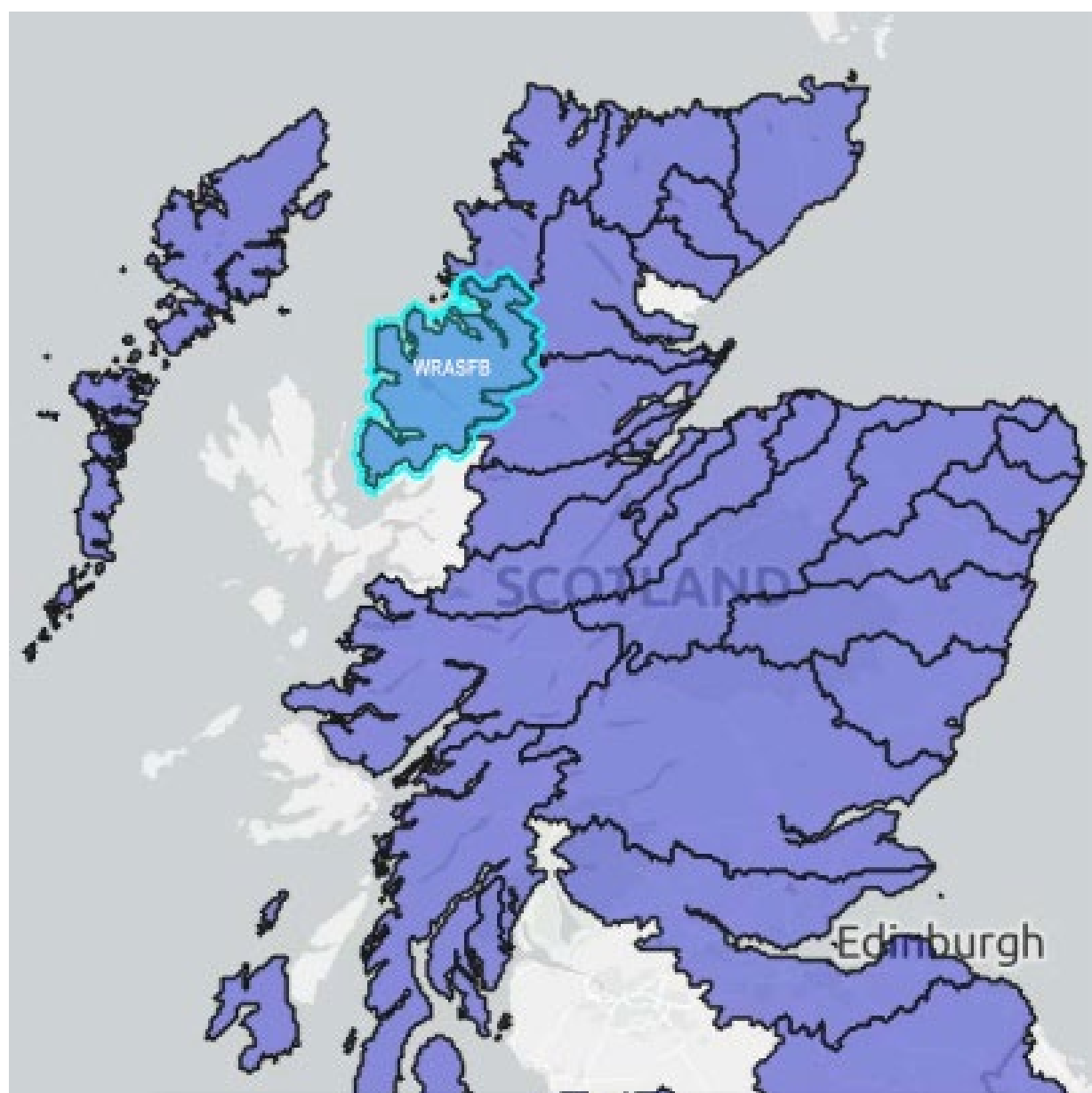
There are no salmon netsmen in the Board area.

Board Staff

The Board meets its obligations with one part-time staff member and voluntary positions:

Kevin Ginty	Clerk to the Board (PT)
Gary Ross	Water Bailiff (V)
Ray Dingwall	Water Bailiff (V)
Neil Morrison	Water Bailiff (V)
Duncan Mackenzie	Water Bailiff (V)
Finlay Owen	Water Bailiff (V)

The Area



What We Do

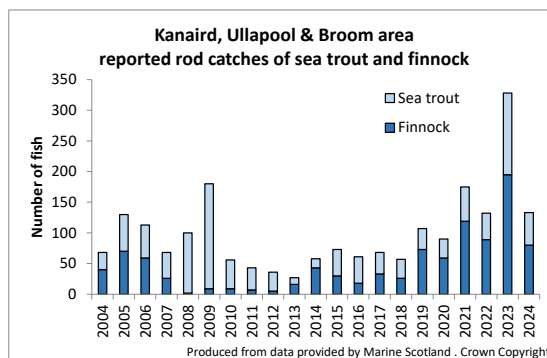
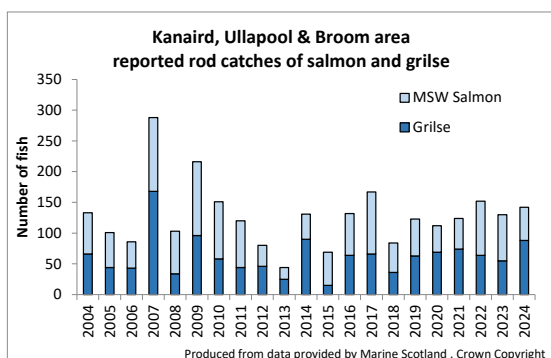
Most DSFBs throughout Scotland are responsible for only one river within one catchment and the funding raised by the levies is used to provide protection and enhancement of salmon and sea-trout stocks throughout the whole system where every proprietor sees the benefits.

WRASFB however, has one of the highest numbers of rivers / catchments within its boundaries so, recognising the geographical extent of the Board area (Kanaird to Applecross) and the high numbers of rivers within it, WRASFB addresses at Board level only those tasks which are essential or are most effectively handled centrally as part of the Board's statutory remit. All other basic river management aspects remain with the proprietors.

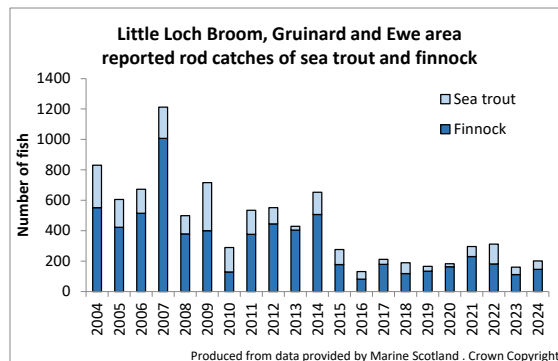
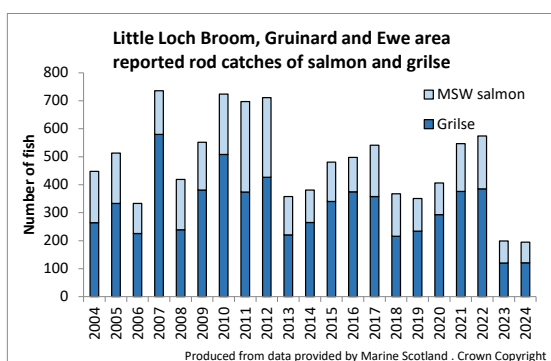
WRFT Biologist's report - Peter Cunningham info@wrft.org.uk

1. Reported rod catches. The following graphs have been updated from figures published at <https://scotland.shinyapps.io/sg-salmon-sea-trout-catch/>.

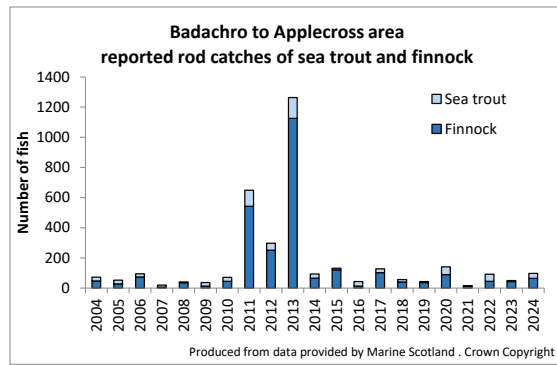
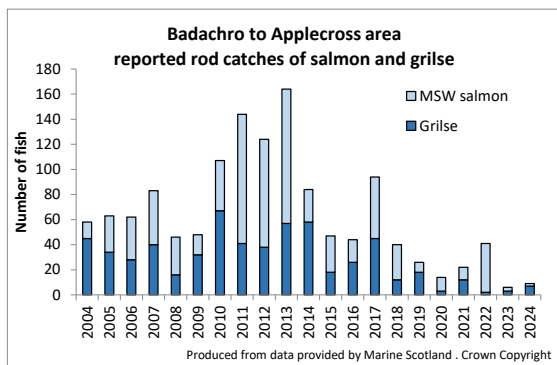
North WR: River Kanaird salmon catch was higher in 2024 than 2023 offsetting lower reported catches in other rivers.



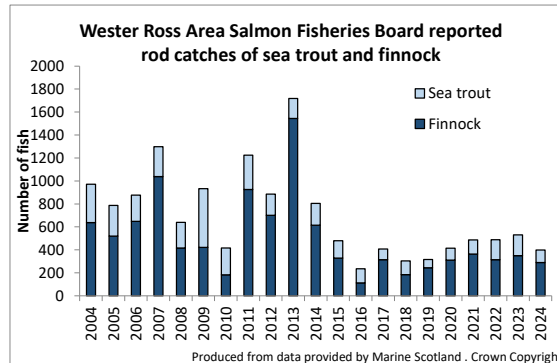
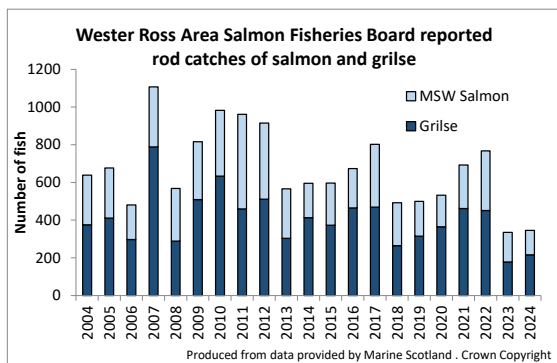
Central WR: Gruinard salmon catch was 1/5 of recorded catch in 2021.



South WR: Badachro catches for 2024 do not appear to have been included in official figures.



Graphs for whole of WRASFB area (north, central and south WRASFB areas, combined)

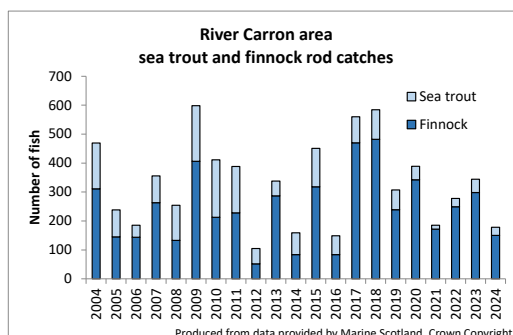
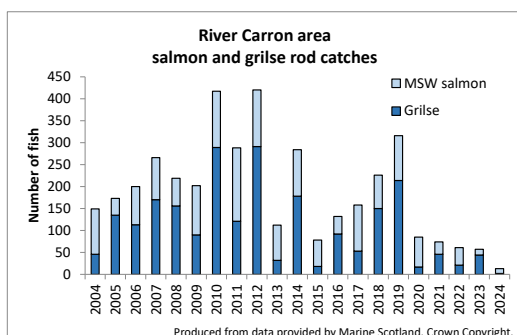


For salmon, reported rod catches for the overall WRASFB area in 2023 and 2024 were lower than in previous recent years. This was largely due to lower reported catch figures for major rivers from Little Loch Broom to Applecross, including the Gruinard rivers and River Ewe system.

For sea trout, reported rod catches in the north of the WRASFB area were less in 2024 than in 2023 (unusually high catches) and close to 2022 catch figures. This concurs with reports from coastal anglers.

For nearby comparison: Loch Carron district (to the south of WRASFB area); the reported finnock catch for this district demonstrates fishing effort in 2024 in River Carron. The very low reported grilse catch in 2024 concurs with a prediction of harm to post-smolt salmon from rivers in this area following very high sea lice levels recorded on sea trout at Applecross in May and June 2023, reported and discussed here:

<https://www.wrft.org.uk/files/Applecross%20Sea%20trout%20monitoring%20report%20Nov23.pdf>.



2. Juvenile fish survey

The primary aim of the 2024 juvenile fish survey was to update knowledge of the distribution and relative abundance of juvenile salmon within the major salmon rivers of the WRASFB area. In 2024, surveys were funded by WRASFB, salmon farming companies (MOWI and Bakkafrøst as part of wild fish monitoring

contracts for EMPs); hydropower companies (monitoring contracts to inform SEPA), and as part of the Salmon Stream Nutrient Restoration project (part-funded by Highlands and Islands Environment Foundation).

Between July and September, sites were surveyed within the WRASFB area in the rivers Kanaird, Ullapool, Lael, Broom, Dundonnell, Gruinard, Allt Beith, Ewe system (several sub-catchments), Badachro, Torridon and Balgy.

Overall, juvenile salmon populations remain reasonably strong in terms of distribution and relative abundance, with salmon fry recorded at all sites surveyed except above occasionally passable falls in the Bruachaig river, the Ghuiragarstidh burn (Ewe system), in the River Balgy headwaters (above Loch an Loin). Recorded Catch per Unit Effort values may be indicative of slightly lower densities at some sites compared to previous years; further analyses and consideration of results to follow. As juvenile salmon production tends to be density dependent at most sites in the WRFT area, reduced numbers of salmon fry (which can be because of redd washout and springtime droughts as well as reduced egg deposition) can lead to faster growth of juvenile salmon and in some situations smolting aged two instead of three years old, or production of larger smolts with higher survival prospects than smaller smolts.

The largest salmon fry were found in the River Balgy (to over 90mm); a salmon parr which had all the attributes of an escaped farm fish was recorded at a site near the mouth of the Loch Coultrie burn above Loch Damph.

At time of writing, there are plans to survey sites in the Applecross River, the Little Gruinard river, Gruinard river headwaters (Abhainn Gleann na Muice), the River Kerry, and Tournaig river, pending suitable conditions and support.

Surveys were led by Peter Cunningham and Nic Butler (when Peter was unable to lead), assisted by Nicky Middleton-Jones and Sean Robertson (Scottish Fisheries Co-ordination Centre manager, with FMS) who kindly offered to help.

Thank you to all estates and landowners for providing permissions, access and information, and to WRASFB for providing support.

A more detailed river by river report of the status of wild salmon populations will be prepared during the winter of 2025-26.

3. Sea trout monitoring

Sea lice infestation has remained a major challenge for both sea trout, and based on various indicators including rod catches, for the survival of post-smolt salmon in some parts of Wester Ross.

In 2025, sea trout have been monitored at five sites to inform three EMPS for salmon farms: the Ardmail salmon farm EMP (Kanaird and Gruinard Bay); the Loch Torridon salmon farms EMP (Torridon estuary and Flowerdale) and the Caol Mor (east of Skye) salmon farms EMP (Applecross).

In addition, sweep netting sessions took place at Boor Bay and Firemore beach (both Loch Ewe) as part of a contract for SEPA (introduction of wild fish monitoring for the Sea Lice Regulatory Framework).

Lice levels were high on sea trout sampled at Kanaird, Flowerdale (Gairloch) and Applecross in spring 2025, but thereafter lower on sea trout sampled during the summer and early autumn.

Some larger sea trout of over 1kg (2.2lb) were recorded in late summer and early autumn demonstrating recovery from sea lice infestation since the spring. There was much evidence of an abundance of sandeels and whitebait (sprats and juvenile herring) from observations of other marine wildlife during summer 2025.

There remains a need to improve control of sea lice on salmon farms in Loch Torridon and at sites within the Wester Ross MPA including the Ardmair farm so that numbers of infective larval lice are lower in coastal waters especially during the period April to June.

Sea trout sea lice monitoring reports can be found here: <https://wrft.org.uk/downloads/files.cfm?id=50>

Thank you to many estates, estate staff, and volunteers (especially from Beinn Eighe NNR) and all other helpers, paid and unpaid for making our planned sweep netting programme achievable (almost!), especially Nic Butler, Chloe Hall, Ant Hall, Alison Hewitt, Ginevra House and several other people who have helped at more than one site.

Following appeals by many salmon farms in Scotland against SEPA's proposed Sea lice Regulatory Framework, sea trout monitoring in 2025 has been funded by MOWI and Bakkafrøst as part of wild fish monitoring contracts, and by SEPA with support from FMS – for sites in Loch Ewe.

4. Salmon stream nutrient restoration project (funded by WRFT, the Highlands and Islands Environment Foundation and by WRASFB)

This project is providing an opportunity to assess the practicality and effectiveness of providing supplementary nutrition to compensate for large reductions in the numbers of adult salmon and sea trout spawning in some of the rivers in Wester Ross compared to the 1960s, 1970s and early 1980s. One further round of e-fishing and kick-sampling (invertebrate monitoring) is planned for early November following which a report will be prepared.

Thank you to proprietors of the Torridon River, Coulin Estate and Kinlochewe estate for permissions to carry out this project; to Hendrix Genetics Inverkerrie smolt farm for provision of farm salmon feed (used as a source of in-stream nutrition), and to Nature Scot Beinn Eighe NNR for support

5. Some other projects

On-line course on wild salmon biology, ecology, fisheries management and conservation. Thank you to private donor for initial support; this has taken much longer to complete and has been on back burner during the busy field season. One challenge is to obtain permissions to be able to use available on-line content (illustrations, diagrams and videos) which are subject to copyright from organisations including the Atlantic Salmon Trust. Work will resume following the field season with the aim of launching an initial session early in the new year.

Wester Ross Seagrass Restoration Project. Funded by SSEN via Scottish Marine Environment Enhancement Fund, this project aims to restore 0.5 ha of seagrass meadows by 2028 in Loch Ewe where seagrass was formerly present within living memory. We were delighted to welcome Diarbhaile Wentworth to the WRFT team as seagrass restoration project officer. Thank you very much to Duncan and Kate Donald for much support and for providing a project base and to Nic and Nicky Butler with much work to get the project going.

Adult salmon project (for the Scottish Government via Marine Directorate). Data (accurate weight, accurate length and a scale sample) has been obtained for only three salmon during the summer of 2025 despite much angling effort. Thank you to anglers: Russel Robertson, Dr Michael Aitchison, Dr Toby Landeryou; and to Alasdair MacDonald (Dundonnell estate) for much effort to support this project. I don't think we will be able to do it again based on lack of results!

Roadside interpretation panels describing fisheries and wildlife for lay by on A832 overlooking Gruinard Bay. This project has been part-funded by Sea-Changers. Four panels have been designed and are nearly ready for printing and putting up, following consultation with the local community council and local residents. One of

the panels is entitled 'A last stronghold for the Atlantic salmon'. Because of issues relating to obtaining HC planning permission ('advertisement consent') and another issue, our aim is to have the interpretation panels in place for Spring 2026.

6. Proposed winter work (part-funded by WRASFB)

- Preparation of an updated 'Status of Salmon in Wester Ross report', to include analyses of the results of juvenile fish surveys in 2024 and 2025. Previous report can be found here: [Status of Wild Salmon in Wester Ross Report for 2021v1Feb22.pdf](#)
- Preparation of a sea trout monitoring report. We have a backlog of sea trout scales to read which can provide information about the growth and survival of sea trout in Wester Ross; some scale reading may be included. The WRFT Trout Scale Catalogue may be revised with some additional examples of sea trout from Wester Ross. See www.wrft.org.uk/files/Wester%20Ross%20Sea%20Trout%20Scale%20Catalogue.pdf
- Grant applications for riparian woodland restoration project and / or a follow up salmon-stream nutrient restoration project.
- Meetings with river managers and owners and other interested parties to discuss opportunities for addressing some of the issues of concern.
- Some follow up monitoring of spring spawning herring around Wester Ross and their habitats. It is not inconceivable that high densities of larvae herring in the seas around and to the north of Wester Ross is highly beneficial to the survival of post-smolt salmon as they migrate to sea from Wester Ross Rivers. See [Wester Ross Fisheries Trust : Pre-spawning herring shoals attract whales and other wildlife to coastal waters](#)

7. Thank you

Thank you also to Dr Sue Ward (WRFT Administrator) and Veronica Mullaney (WRFT Book keeper) for much behind the scenes work including project grant application preparation and reporting; paying invoices; and to Dr Michael Aitchison (WRFT Chair) and Dr Steve Kett (WRFT Vice-chair) for weekly management meetings to review progress and address any issues of concern.

Fisheries Management

Whilst the physical day-to-day fisheries management aspects are left to the proprietors' discretion, the Board, with assistance from WRFT, deals with all aquaculture, hydro planning applications and consultations. *See Wild Fisheries Reforms below for further details regarding Fisheries Management.*

Overview

In May 2024, the Board contributed content from EMPs in our area to the preparatory work undertaken by FMS for the Sea Lice Regulatory Framework, and attended online meetings where the Framework and subsequent appeals by the aquaculture industry (see further below) were discussed. Through our membership of FMS, a number of webinars and consultations were held throughout the year in which members were able to participate, including sessions on sea trout and consultation on the Inshore Fisheries Management Improvement Programme.

NatureScot granted a licence for the control of fish-eating birds from Loch Maree to the Sea, and the Board continued to support a PhD student investigating *Saprolegnia*.

An application was made and then withdrawn for the installation of an automatic feeder at the Corry Fish Farm in Loch Broom.

The end of cycle EMP meeting for Ardmair was held at the beginning of August 2024. Discussions with MOWI and Bakkafrøst (September 2024) considered sequencing production cycles between farms, and reducing the sea lice levels in the smolt window. A further meeting was held in March 2025 with MOWI and Bakkafrøst to discuss smolt run timings, and also EMPs in general. MOWI and Bakkafrøst have indicated that they are taking the smolt run timings on board in connection with their future production planning.

An alert was issued by FMS for pink salmon, which had been found in the River Spey. Our area has also been on the lookout for this species. An update was received in August 2025 from FMS reporting that pink salmon had been recorded in five sites in Scotland. The sites were in the Borders, and further north on the East side up to Thurso. To date (September 2025), no pink salmon have been recorded in our area. However, it is likely that they will appear and have quite possibly already arrived and not yet been recorded.

The Aquaculture Stewardship Council ('ASC') carried out full assessments for the Bakkafrøst farm sites. Comments were submitted by the Board along with consultation including the WRFT. The results for two farms in the Torridon loch system were published; Aird in May 2025, and Sgeir Dughall in June 2025.

The Board's Triennial Elections were held in December 2024, and the Board members and officers appointed.

Joint EMP meetings were held with MOWI and Bakkafrøst in April 2025. Discussions included the scheduling of production around smolt run timings, so as to minimise sea lice levels during the smolt run where possible; and the giving of early notice to the Board of figures above an average of 0.5 adult female lice per farmed fish, in advance of general publication. A meeting also took place with Bakkafrøst that addressed high lice levels on their Aird farm.

During the second quarter of 2025 the question of revaluation arose. We were advised by Highland Council that a revaluation of salmon fishings was recommended as the current valuation roll expires in 2026. Following consultation with Fish Legal it was agreed that the Board would request a revaluation be undertaken, and this request was made. The revaluation is currently in progress.

Following detailed proposals from the WRFT, it was agreed to increase the support provided by the Board to enable several additional strands of monitoring work to be carried out.

In July 2025, the Board received an FOI request from Wildfish.org. Following advice from FMS, we responded to it under the terms of the EISR. The Board is not required to respond to FOI requests. However, it is required to respond in a similar manner to EISR requests, where the request concerns environmental and related information. FOI requests that relate to environmental information must be treated under EISR. Ordinarily, we would reply to any requests for information. However, this request required a significant amount of time. Under EISR the Board is permitted to charge for time spent sourcing information for replies to EISR requests and the Board's website has been updated to make this clear. In future, EISR requests requiring more than two hours of staff time for a response will be handled following the receipt of a fee based on an estimate of the staff time involved.

In late Summer 2025, water scarcity reports became widespread and problems with low river levels having impacted smolt runs across most of Scotland. Recovery to more normal levels was seen in the Board's area in late August/early September. Water scarcity continues to be a problem elsewhere in Scotland.

Fisheries Protection

The limitations on WRASFB levy income means it is not financially possible for it to employ any full-time water bailiffs but it authorises those who have passed the bailiff qualification course of the Institute of Fisheries Management. Although directly employed by individual fisheries, combined operations within the Board area have been carried out in past years. The Scottish Government moratorium on coastal / mixed stock netting operations throughout Scotland, continues to be in force. It is also a criminal offence to be in possession (and also to kill) wild salmon from a river in the Board area with a category 3 conservation status.

Fisheries Development

In the Board area, the bigger rivers are usually fully booked during their normal fishing season. For others that are fully dependent on rain, anglers have not been keen to buy any days on rivers that may or may not have water or fish. There is licensing of angling to local communities, e.g. the Shieldaig Angling Club has enjoyed a rent-free licence to fish the Balgy river in recent years.

Wild Fisheries Reform

Whilst few of the recommendations of the WFR have been given effect to by ScotGov, one important development is that SEPA has accepted a role as the future regulator for sea-lice interactions between aquaculture and wild fish, with powers to grant or refuse development consents. – see additional information above.

Following consultations, SEPA announced the new Sea Lice Regulatory Framework imposing targets on the aquaculture industry sites specifying permitted levels of sea lice and remedial actions that may be required. Existing licenses were amended with Notices of Variation. In February 2025, the aquaculture industry applied to DPEA and appealed all 260 Notices of Variation issued by SEPA under CAR. FMS are currently preparing a coordinated response. The Board attended online discussions in June 2025 with FMS and the aquaculture industry and we await FMS' coordinated response.

Compliance with Good Governance Requirements

Governance

The Aquaculture and Fisheries (Scotland) Act 2013 requires all DSFBs to operate in a transparent manner. As part of this, WRASFB uses the FMS Code of Good Practice. A copy of the code can be found at the FMS web site: www.asfb.org.uk/publications.

This section of the report details how the WRASFB meets and proposes to continue to meet the terms of the reporting requirements of the Aquaculture and Fisheries (Scotland) Act 2013.

Meetings

The annual and proprietors' meetings for this year have been made open to the public and advertised on our web site (www.wrasfb.dsfb.org.uk), along with agenda information. They have also been advertised in the local press, at least 21 days prior to the scheduled meetings taking place. The Board meeting for **28th October 2025** has been advertised on the website and made open to the public. The minutes of all meetings, once approved, are also published on our web site.

Complaints

The Aquaculture and Fisheries (Scotland) Act 2013 requires all DSFBs to establish a formal complaints procedure. A copy of the WRASFB complaints procedure is available at [WRASFB Complaints Procedure](#). There were no complaints made to the Board in 2024-2025.

Declaration of Interests

All members of the WRASFB are required to complete and keep up-to-date a declaration of interests relevant to their position on the Board. The current register is available at the WRASFB office.

Financial Accounts 2024-2025

To be presented at the meeting.