

Meeting of the Wester Ross Area Salmon Fishery Board

April 29th 2026 1000hrs

Gairloch Office and by Zoom

Minutes

Present:-

in person: Richard Munday, Peter Cunningham, Kevin Ginty (Clerk)

online: Stephen Bate (Convener), Rosie Nicoll, Pippa Cliff, Michael Aitchison, Gordon Crawford, Steve Kett

1. Apologies were received from Donald Rice.
2. Matters arising from the approved minutes of the 28th October 2025 Meeting that have already been circulated.

SB – asked if we had received an alternative quotation for the preparation of annual accounts. KG to obtain another quote.

Applecross Trust restocking – KG has written to the Applecross Trust but received no response. This is to be followed up with advice from FMS.

3. WRFT updates and review of funding (MA)

MA thanked the Board for their support last year. Grant funding received for the sea grass project. Nursery ponds are now fully irrigated and in use, and should be able to be used to restore habitat in Loch Ewe. A new six month post has been appointed for a marine biologist to work on the project. MA reported the Trust is in robust financial health currently, but facing increases in insurance and accountancy costs, and wages and overhead.

RN asked how the Trust's daily cost for the proposed contribution from the Board for 2026-27 was arrived at. MA replied that the rate used was the fully overheaded rate. Funded projects have in the past cost the Trust overall due to overhead considerations and the overhead rate is used for third-party grant funding.

SB asked re Loch Ewe, if the Trust had considered partnering with other organisations such as WildFish.org. There was some discussion on potential collaborations. PC reported that WildFish had been in touch

about a possible project. SB asked if the sea trout monitoring project proposed is an ongoing method for continuing work already conducted. PC replied that different catch methods are employed. New rules around insurance for boats mean it was very expensive to carry out netting.

SEPA have previously funded the Loch Ewe work but are not doing so this year. Existing records go back twenty years, and it would be good to continue that monitoring.

4. Draft 2026-27 Budget and Levy Setting

KG presented the draft budget for 2026-27

GC commented that the pressures on businesses in terms of taxation (National Insurance on wages), compliance costs, etc were significant. He has every sympathy with the trust but does not support the continued increase in the levy.

RN replied that she agreed with GC, and also sympathised with the projects proposed. RM said that the Board should look to see what is affordable, and take a final decision when the roll becomes available.

GC discussed the funding request list from WRFT. MA replied that the projects proposed are all essentially unfunded. MA said he appreciates the pressure that the Board is under.

RN asked PC what he regarded as the main priorities. PC said that some rivers that were not surveyed last year, including the Little Gruinard. PC would anticipate doing less electrofishing and reduce the cost. The sea trout report could be covered by EMPs, apart from Loch Ewe which is not currently covered by an EMP. PC would make a case to Wildfish for support for that.

PC also reported that the seagrass project had been a very successful application, and that the seagrass project is a very valuable salmon and sea trout habitat monitoring tool. Bruachaig river was also in need of monitoring.

SB said that he didn't see a basis for increasing the levy, and therefore the question for him was whether the Board's reserves could be partially allocated to the Trust, possibly £5,000? Some reduction in reserve would be possible, without lowering the contingency. GC was in principle opposed to reduction in the contingency.

GC said that in principle he would support an additional one-off contribution of 5k for the Trust, from the reserve.

RM said he thought a decision to keep the levy constant and make modest use of reserves would be a good one. Funding going into woodland restoration could potentially be approached to discover the impact of bank side work on juvenile stocks.

SB concluded that, subject to the outcome of the valuation roll and once all Board Members were in a position to express their views following this meeting, that the Board decide whether for this coming financial year the

Trust's funding be 25k (20k plus 5k); with the Trust to approach Wildfish as appropriate, and seek partnerships, subject to the Trust's approval. MA agreed with the approach and said that particularly with the work in Loch Ewe this would be good.

5. Office accommodation provision

There has been no movement regarding this issue.

6. Outstanding invoices

KG to chase the outstanding five proprietors with letters advising that we will proceed to small claims, to go out with the new invoices.

7. Update on aquaculture events since the last meeting including EMPs and wild-fish monitoring.

SB reported on the EMP meeting re Ardmair. Draft minutes were circulated, not yet approved by MOWI. High mortality rates discussed, and subsequently the lice levels have kept below the 0.5 value. PC suggested Scottish Sea Farms be invited to attend the EMP meetings, even though they are not covered by the EMP. The Board should approach SSF to attend these meetings going forward, which was agreed. The next meeting for Ardmair is to take place in the autumn with MOWI.

PC said that MOWI were planning to change the cage sizes to much larger cages, there might be a planning application coming for this. MOWI were holding out the prospect of larger cages reducing the scope for lice transmission.

Bakkafrost ASC accreditation report released. The Board's comments appear not to have been recorded (KG to follow up). If the lice levels are low when the assessors arrive then they appear to pass the test.

8. WRFT Biologist – Peter Cunningham

PC presented his biologist's report, and then the salmon monitoring report (previously circulated). There are improved numbers of salmon. Sea lice, and also instability arising from spates last year, caused problems.

Sea trout monitoring is largely funded by the fish farms, which is a valuable support. Lower levels of active fish farming south of Gairloch have coincided with much lower levels of lice on wild fish in Loch Gairloch.

There is a new HVDC cable being installed, running up from Dundonnell. Regular inspections are being undertaken to ensure that silt is captured in run-off ponds. GC reported that he was in negotiations with SSEN regarding compensation for environmental damage. GC and DR, PC will arrange to meet up to discuss.

9. AOCB

There were no additional items of business.

10. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting will be in the autumn, date to be arranged.

The meeting closed at 1125.

KG

Proposed: Gordon Crawford

Seconded: Rosie Nicoll