

Subject: Beaully DSFB Board meeting
Date: 28 September 2023
Location: Laxford House, Inverness & by video conference
Present: Frank Spencer-Nairn (FSN); Neil Cameron (NC); Mike Spencer-Nairn (MSN); Jim Braithwaite (JB)
In attendance: Ruth Watts (RW); Ali Skinner (AS); Anthony Watkins (AW); Alastair Campbell (AC); Sarah Forfar (SRF)

MINUTES

ITEM	ACTION OWNER
1.0 Apologies	
1.1 Apologies were received from Nick Jackson (NJ), Victoria Rotheroe (VR), Charles McAndrew (CMA) and Tom Waring (TW).	
2.0 Register of interest – agenda items	
2.1 None	
3.0 Minutes of last meeting	
3.1 The minutes of the previous Board meeting held on 8 th June 2023 were proposed by FSN and MSN and approved by those present. <u>Action</u> – Clerk to arrange for approved minutes to be published on Board’s website.	CLERK
4.0 Appointment of Board member to fill casual vacancy	
4.1 Following the casual vacancy on the Board arising from the resignation of George Purdie, it had previously been agreed that nominations were to be submitted to the Clerk by 1 August 2023.	
4.2 The Board discussed that the appointment would be for the remaining term until the triennial elections in June 2024.	
4.3 FSN reported that one nomination was submitted from CMA.	
4.4 CMA had sent his apologies and unfortunately could not attend the meeting.	
4.5 FSN proposed that Board fill the space with the one nomination received, MSN seconded the nomination. The appointment of CMA to fill the casual vacancy as a representative of Upper Proprietors was approved by those present.	

5.0 Matters arising

- 5.1 **Operational meetings** - FSN noted that the operational meetings work well with the number of meetings now reduced to every 6 weeks. FSN, MSN and TW attended the meeting from the Board along with RW, AS and now AW.
- 5.2 The Board agreed the meetings prove worthwhile and provide a good opportunity to allow other proprietors to give feedback or discussion points.
- 5.3 **Senior Biologist Cover** – The Board thanked RW for the great efforts in recruitment and advertising. The job was advertised on FMS, IFM, indeed, Environment jobs, and Environmental job. Only two candidates applied for the job.
- 5.4 Ant Watkins' employment commenced on 25th September. He is set up with a new laptop which has been purchased and a new email address. Ant had worked for SEPA for 14 years and had some dealings with SSE in the past. The Board were delighted that AW has joined the team.
- 5.5 **Seasonal Bailiff update** - following G Coleman resigning as Seasonal Bailiff, the Board has re-employed Bob Smart who had retired the previous year. Bob was previously employed part time. AS confirmed a part time bailiff would be required for next year (plus this would provide help and assistance with the smolt traps). Bob reported to AS that he was keen to do this again next year if his health was allowing.
- 5.6 FSN suggested that the Board offer a 1-year position to Bob Smart, on the understanding that at this time next year the Board will advertise and fill the position of seasonal bailiff. FSN proposed that the decision is to be confirmed following a discussion with representation from the Lower Beaully Syndicate, as no representative was present. GH / TW to discuss and provide comment before December meeting. Decision to be confirmed with Bob by the end of the season.
- 5.7 **SSEN Operations** – FSN explained his disappointed that there appears to be a communication issue with the Board and SSE but also with SSE and SSEN. The Board need to be notified earlier of any network outages.
- 5.8 AC to write a letter to SSE explaining that the board require that they are notified of any shut down, regardless of shutdown cause. Action – AC to determine who is to be contacted to get the best result and send letter.
- 5.9 FSN noted that the transmission side of works is likely to increase with the line upgrade, this might become a more frequent issue that the Board don't want.
- 5.10 **Proposed Conservation Grading** – Marine Scotland Science had proposed the River Beaully be recategorised as Grade 2 for 2024. RW explained that rod catches have been good previously. One issue – undue catch weighting above Aigas dam.
- 5.11 Following an objection, Marine Scotland contacted RW and have requested information on fish counts from 2017 onwards. RW and Ant will provide more in-depth information to MSS.
- 5.12 RW noted that the data MS are using is from the Aigas dam which is higher, therefore the Lower is not included, RW asked MS to look at all counts first just to sense check.
- 5.13 AC raised concerns that this year's catch will be very low, which might impact future grading.

TW/GH/CLERK

CLERK

RW/AW

- 5.14 RW has asked MSS that the highest figures for Aigas and Kilmorack be incorporated. RW had queries on how they are using the juvenile fish density information and further queries on what habitat areas are being used, a map has been requested by RW.
- 5.15 It was discussed that dropping from Category 1 to Category 2 is not a huge concern. However, dropping to Category 3 is a big concern. NC has concerns that all of Scotland will be catch and release very soon as all rivers are in the same situation.
- 5.16 NC suggested speaking with Allan Wells at Fishery Management Scotland to gain a better understanding. RW
- 5.17 RW noted that rod catches are not reliable figures in comparison with juvenile survey counts, which shows similar numbers from historic records and more recent surveys.
- 5.18 **Staff handbook** - RW referred to the Staff & Board member handbook which has been updated with added appendices.
- 5.19 The Board thanked RW for her work on this and agreed that the general content was very useful, but level of detail should be kept to a minimum to allow for flexibility and not lead to making regular changes (i.e., leased vehicle from Arnold Clark). Regarding the driving policy, a short document should be provided in each vehicle with up-to-date details.
- 5.20 AC raised concerns that an employment solicitor will be required to review the manual before moving further. NC agreed and stated that the Ness Board recently went through this exercise a few years ago where all employees were given a new contract. NC raised concerns that the Board does not want to expose themselves and be liable.
- 5.21 All agreed that the amended manual should be issued to an employee solicitor for review. CLERK
Action – AC to speak to solicitor for a ‘light touch’.
- 5.22 **Bird control license** – 1 November 2023 to May 2024. AC asked if there were any views as to who would have the authorisation. In previous years this was ██████ and ██████. AC queried if it is worth allowing someone else having the authorisation to ensure the Board are making use of this.
- 5.23 JB explained that he understands beats need more information and guidance on how to scare birds and what methods are allowed to scare etc. Action – inform BAC of permitted scaring methods. RW will email the recording form. RW/CLERK
- 5.24 RW has asked that AS is informed of all scaring that is carried out so this can be recorded.
- 5.25 RW stated that TW had mentioned he was happy for ██████ and ██████ to continue if they were content with this, MSN added that if Gordon was to carry on, then the Board should make it known to him that we would like him to meet the quota.
- 5.26 MSN offered that if there is nobody else to come forward his gamekeeper would do this if the license allowed.
- 5.27 Action – issue an updated authorisation to ██████. CLERK

6.0 Netting station buyout

- 6.1 Netting acquisition is ongoing. Draft missives are not yet signed by either party. A letter of comfort had been sought from Highland Council in relation to access to one site.
- 6.2 NC stated that the Board are basically in a position to settle if the letter of comfort is provided. The Trust have given the seller to the 31st of October to sign with a view to conclude in November.
- 6.3 Beaully doners have raised funds in the region of £[REDACTED]. If the sales don't settle, the money is to be returned to doners. Action - FSN to chase further funds from upper catchment proprietors. Previous date for collating funds has now passed but funds should still be chased.

FSN

7.0 Senior Biologist and Bailiff's report

- 7.1 **Bailiff's report** – AS referred to his report issued to the Board prior to the meeting and summarised recent activity. He thanked JB for allowing the board to use his drone to check on the Lower Beaully for Japanese Knotweed and review Pacific Pink Salmon, although it proved very difficult to spot any Redds.
- 7.2 Catchment patrols were arranged with Police Scotland throughout the season which have been useful and had maintained a visible presence. However, AS referred to the lack of bodies within Police Scotland.
- 7.3 With the help of Bob Smart, the catchment had been patrolled for 14 hours a day, where possible to continue to deter potential poaching activities.
- 7.4 AS continues to liaise with Glass syndicate Bailiff and Upper Beaully Ghillie regarding joint working and sharing information on incidents.
- 7.5 **Senior Biologist Report** – RW referred to the written report that had been circulated to Board members prior to the meeting. RW confirmed that the National Electro-Fishing Programme (NEPs) had recently completed. FMS has put in a funding bid to include new electro-fishing kit for the Beaully and a set of volunteer waders. Outcome to be confirmed.
- 7.6 Hydro-morphology – walkovers are complete for Beaully and Farrar. Reports are due to be written including gradients of each section. There was a lack of spawning substrate and lack of gravel and RW noted it is unlikely the Board would receive funding to tackle the sediment management. There is a possibility for SSE to work with Breendon Aggregates to deliver suitable substrate to the river. Photos from this are showing a consistent story. RW aiming to write reports before she goes on leave, if not, AW will complete.
- 7.7 Japanese Knotweed had been successfully treated. Invoice has been received and grant income is due from Highland Nature Restoration, in the region of £9,000.
- 7.8 To improve seal predation control, RW noted that FMS have placed a bid an Acoustic deterrent device, along with a Canadian canoe for deployment. If the proposal is approved, the Board must take logistics into account. It is known that seal(s) have been an issue in the Lower.

- 7.9 Reminder to all members that more fish images on social media are required. Action – AS to speak with Gordon Armstrong regarding images from the Lower. **AS**
- 7.10 **Smolt Monitoring** - RW discussed the smolt process and raised concerns that SSE potentially are not implementing phase 2 flows soon enough and questioned if it should be accepted there is always 300 smolts trapped in the dam gate slots each year. It was agreed to keep the pressure on SSE at key timings to increase chances of getting this information.
- 7.11 RW reported SSE communication has been disappointing. RW looks forward to the meeting on 8th November where RW and AW will vocalise this to SSE with a view to improve the communication.
- 7.12 Going forward, RW wants to look at the smolt behaviours in relation to the dams. RW has a meeting with SSE where she will request information on the minimum megawattage figures for overnight for when the smolts are migrating. Action – RW to provide feedback from meeting. **RW**
- 7.13 AW is going to install a temperature logger downstream of Kilmorack Dam and review these statistics; temperature reviews have not been carried out yet.
- 7.14 RW confirmed the need to smolt trap for another 2, or 3 years at least. This year's site was not particularly successful. The new site should be better for at least 2 years and ideally 3.
- 8.0 Financial report – year to date**
- 8.1 AC referred to financial reports that had been circulated to members prior to the meeting. AC summarised the financial report and noted that the budget for subscriptions is listed incorrectly on budget.
- 8.2 It was noted that vehicle expenses are above budget, but with other areas falling behind budget, this levels out.
- 8.3 At the next meeting the draft budgets will be discussed and the levy will be set. **CLERK/SRF**
- 8.4 RW mentioned there may be unbudgeted costs with extra training for AW, RW will circulate potential costs. **RW**
- 9.0 Any other business**
- 9.1 End of season drinks social for all anglers, proprietors and ghillies is planned for Friday 20th October.
- 9.2 There was no further business
- 10.0 Date of next meeting**
- 10.1 It was confirmed that the next meeting of the Board would be held on Thursday 7th December 2023 at 10.30am.

10.2 The Annual Public Meeting will be held in the Lovat Arms in Beaulieu on Thursday 7th December 2023 at 7.00pm.