

Subject: Beaully DSFB Board meeting  
 Date: 07 December 2023  
 Location: Laxford House, Inverness & by video conference  
 Present: Frank Spencer-Nairn (FSN); Victoria Rotheroe (VR); Mike Spencer-Nairn (MSN); Gavin Haywood (GH); Jim Braithwaite (JB); Charles MacAndrew (CMA)  
 In attendance: Ali Skinner (AS); Anthony Watkins (AW); Alastair Campbell (AC); Claire Mackay (CM).

## MINUTES

ITEM	ACTION OWNER
<b>1.0 Apologies</b>	
1.1 Apologies were received from Nick Jackson (NJ), Tom Waring (TW), Neil Cameron (NC).	
<b>2.0 Register of interest – agenda items</b>	
2.1 There were no declarations of interest concerning the agenda.	
<b>3.0 Minutes of last meeting</b>	
3.1 Minutes from the previous Board meeting held on 28 September 2023 were reviewed. The following corrections were noted: - <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Item 5(e) – Aigas dam, not pool. Clarify only rod catches above dam taken into account in conservation grading assessment.</li> <li>- Typo in last paragraph of that section: - rod catches</li> </ul>	
3.2 Subject to these corrections, the Minutes were approved. The Clerk to arrange for publication on the Board’s website.	<b>CLERK</b>
<b>4.0 Matters Arising</b>	
4.1 <b>Seasonal Bailiff Recruitment</b> - FSN reported Bob Smart no longer wishes to be considered for Seasonal Bailiff for 2024 due to personal reasons. The Board approved advertising the position, with a view to appointment before smolt trapping commences in April.	
4.2 In the event an appointment is not made by April, AW & AS to consider a contingency plan for staff cover during the period of smolt monitoring.	<b>AW / AS</b>
4.3 It was noted that the Glass Syndicate may also be seeking a bailiff. It was agreed that coordinate with the Syndicate may be beneficial. CMA agreed to discuss with the Glass Syndicate Chairman.	<b>CMA</b>
4.4 <b>NBFT Update – Netting Stations Buyout</b> - NC was unable to attend, but had spoken to AC prior to the meeting. Sea Park (Longman) buyout should conclude shortly, though a letter of comfort, or deed of servitude from Highland Council remains outstanding. NC had chased R&R Urquhart for an update.	

- 4.5 Kincurdie buyout - a member of the family is not wanting to sell at present and further discussion is required. In the event the purchase does not proceed, a decision will be needed on any unused donations. These could either be returned or retained for future use. NC to revert to the Board on this. **NC**
- 4.6 Donations potentially still to be received from Upper catchment proprietors. FSN to confirm the total. **FSN**
- 4.7 **Staff Appraisals** - Staff appraisals are to be put on the agenda for next board meeting. FSN and MSN to do appraisals by end March 2024. **FSN / MSN**
- 5.0 Report on BDFB/SSE Liaison Group Meeting 8 November 2023**
- 5.1 Concerns regarding network outages had been raised. The Board was advised to contact SSE Networks (SSE Renewables not having any control over network outages). FSN had since sent an email but awaited a reply.
- 5.2 Smolt protocol monitoring - SSER had reiterated they cannot provide detailed information on flows during the smolt run for commercial confidentiality. GH said Lower Beaully Syndicate continued to have concerns on this and did not accept that this is commercial sensitive information. The Syndicate understands SSER are legally required to demonstrate that smolts aren't killed during passage through the turbines.
- 5.3 AW stated that SSER had acknowledged the needed to demonstrate compliance with the smolt protocol and that current debriefing was inadequate. GH queried if SEPA were involved, and if information needed to be approved by them to validate and show compliance. MSN asked if daily flow figures might be provided, as that wouldn't show individual turbine generation. **Action** - AW to chase SSER to ensure suitable monitoring / reporting is in place for 2024. **AW**
- 5.4 The next meeting is on Tuesday 12th March at 2pm and GH is going to talk to syndicate regarding the cost involved about attending the meeting in person, he will look to be there if needed, AC mentioned a remote link will be sent to all attendees.
- 5.5 FSN gave an update on the fish lift counters; AI technology had been deployed at Kilmorack and Aigas in 2023, but as yet SSER had provided no figures, which was extremely disappointing. This had been chased and SSER indicated they aimed to provide the figures by mid-December. The older counter at Beannachran appeared to show very low figures for the year and FSN questioned its accuracy.
- 5.6 GH reported that Lower Beaully Syndicate members were concerned about the lack of figures and requested that the Board put pressure on SSER on this. It is not a local problem, wherever there are counters, there is an issue.
- 5.7 The annual contribution from SSER to the Board was discussed. SSER had confirmed this would be increased in line with RPI. A sum has been budgeted, however SSER is still to confirm the total. AC will seek confirmation from SSER. FSN noted that SSER also operates a biodiversity fund for specific projects, which AW will apply for if eligible. **CLERK**

At this point GH left the meeting

## 6.0 Review of 2023 Catches and Dam Counts

- 6.1 AC mentioned figures have been received from most proprietors however there is a few more to add, the total received to date was 602 salmon caught, 582 returned. The total catch for 2022 was 980, with 2023 showing a big drop in comparison to last year.
- 6.2 JB reported a nil return for salmon for the first time ever by the Angling Club and is a matter of grave concern. The water levels were reasonable in July, but fish runs appeared to have changed, only 10 were hooked but none landed. The fishing effort has also declined, from August members couldn't get in the water safely on 3 beats.
- 6.3 AW remarked on the decline in sea trout catches also being of concern and suggested this be discussed under the Conservation Policy.

## 7.0 Financial report – year to date / 2024 Budget & Fishery Assessment

- 7.1 AC provided a brief report on the finances of the Board for the year to date. A copy of the management account up to the end of October had been provided prior to the meeting. Income year to date was £17,320 below budget, primarily relating to budgeted donations. Expenditure was also slightly down on budget by £2,309, with the net position for the year to date showing net income of £15,628, some £15,011 below budget.
- 7.2 **Action** - AW is to confirm income for Japanese knotweed treatment. AW
- 7.3 FSN introduced the proposed budget for 2024, which had been drafted by Bidwells and discussed by the operational group prior to the Board meeting. The budget as drafted comprised total expenditure of £179,480 and showed a zero net balance, resulting in a potential levy assessment on proprietors of £1.28 per £1 RV (2023 - £1.17). Two alternative scenarios, based on a levy assessment of £1.17 and £1.20 and £1.24 respectively were also considered. Both would result in a net deficit for the year, with the balance being met from the Board's reserves.
- 7.4 The Board agreed that a seasonal bailiff should be employed for seven months. It was noted that a legal review of the staff handbook would incur additional professional fees. This had been budgeted for.
- 7.5 The Board agreed in principle that a levy assessment of £1.24 per £1 RV should be implemented and agreed to review this in March 2024 prior to the first assessment invoices being issued. CLERK

## 8.0 Senior Biologist's Report & Bailiffs Report

- 8.1 **Bailiff's report** – AS referred to the summary of activity over the last year provided prior to the meeting. He confirmed a reduction in poaching had been observed during the year. Warnings had been issued, but no individuals had been caught with salmon and no nets had been found. He reported that the new gates on the Lower Beauly were helping significantly in reducing unwanted activity.
- 8.2 **Biologists Report** – AW referred to the written report that has been circulated to Board members prior to the meeting.
- 8.3 AW highlighted that part of AS's role, in addition to bailiffing, was supervision of SISI work and volunteers. He believed this wasn't not fully understood by proprietors / ghillies.

- 8.4 AW reported some issues with obtaining consent for locating mink traps throughout the system. AW to raise with individual proprietors / managers. **AW**
- 8.5 Data input for the 2023 NEPS programme had now been entered into the Marine Scotland data portal. AW had requested confirmation from MS as to how this data is / will be used, including as part of the conservation grading process.
- 8.6 CMA enquired if there was a process in place for monitoring water temperatures and subsequently advising anglers not to fish if temperatures are too high. AW advised that RW had installed temperature logger(s) in the upper catchment, however additional loggers would be beneficial. The Board agreed that a protocol for informing proprietors / anglers of potentially dangerous temperatures needed considered. AC highlighted his understanding that the danger was not purely related to temperature, but also to oxygenation levels. **AW**
- 9.0 2024 Conservation Policy & Salmon Conservation Regulations**
- 9.1 Following review of the policy, including sea trout, it was agreed to carry forward into 2024 without amendment. It was noted that reported catch and release levels of both salmon and sea trout remained high and the existing policy was being implemented by anglers. **CLERK**
- 10.0 AOCB**
- It was agreed that a WhatsApp group amongst proprietors and bailiffs would be very valuable. AS to look to implement. **AS**
- JB mentioned it would be a good idea for the Board to put an education programme (junior development or junior angling) and to get together and sort something out for education. JB / AW to discuss options. **JB / AW**
- FSN highlighted that the next Board triennial election is due by June 2024. Early indication to proprietors would be helpful, with a view to ascertaining interest / availability in standing for election. FSN also indicated that he and MSN would prefer not to continue in their roles of Convener / Vice-Convener following the election, though would be happy to continue on The Board. **ALL**
- 11.0 Date of Next Meeting**
- Provisionally Tuesday 19<sup>th</sup> March at 2pm.