

Beauly District Fishery Board

Board Meeting

Date: 25th June 2025

Location: Bidwells, Ness Meeting Room/By Microsoft Teams

Attendees: Charles McAndrew (CMc), Eugenie Haniel (EH), Victoria Rothroe (VR), Alastair Campbell (AC), Ruth Watts (RW), Ali Skinner (AS), Hamish Hope (HH) Tom Chetwynd (TC) and Frank Spencer-Nairn (FSN).

DRAFT MINUTES

1. APOLOGIES

Donald Fraser and Jim Braithwaite were not able to attend.

2. MINUTES OF BOARD MEETING MARCH 2025

No changes to the minutes of the March 2025 minutes and they were approved. AC made minor recommendations to presentation of minutes.

3. BIOLOGIST UPDATE

RW invited questions on the biologist report (report will be made available on the Boards website).

3.1 SEAL LICENCE AND BIRD LICENCE UPDATE

CMc asked if there was an update regarding the delay of the seal licence. RW reported that we have not received any further information and that the delay is Scotland wide. It was noted that the marksmen training was still due to take place in September.

The concern was raised that the delay could impact the Boards likelihood of having a licence in place for 2026. EH asked if the licence is to be an annual licence and if the next application will follow the same process. RW responded saying that it is expected to be valid for a few years. Feedback has been provided through consultation and FMS regarding the application process, it is hopeful that the process will have been improved.

The Board will continue to push for a seal licence to be valid past spring.

AC highlighted that it is way beyond the deadline for the outcome and it is not good enough. It is suggested that we write formally expressing our concern. RW is to speak with FMS.

VR asked if we have explored all legal methods of seal deterrence. RW/AS discussed the acoustic device which has been previously used. It is not effective unless used by the dam. The Beauly catchment is not the only area finding the acoustic deterrence ineffective.

AC pointed out the comparison of deer impact. From a logical view it should be treated the same. RW has requested for a species hierarchy of importance.

EH asked if it would be for 1 seal only. The application submitted requests 2 grey seals.

The Bird Licence will be submitted to NatureScot and reapplied for. For 2026 permission will be given to someone near the Glass as that is where most birds seem to be.

ACTION: RW to speak with FMS and continue following up.

ACTION: RW to check the outcome of other previous licence applications for number of seals allowed.

The hosting of staff per invasive species control was discussed (further information can be seen in the June biologist update report on our website). CMc think it's a good idea as it could potentially lead to long term revenue. AC raised the concern as though the salary is covered, the Board retains the responsibility/liability for the employees. Further information is required before a final decision can be made. RW noted that if the Ness and Beaully Fishery Trust revamps, SISI would sit with them.

ACTION: RW to continue liaison and request further information.

3.2 FLOWS

CMc said that the Beaully Angling Club are concerned with flows as it was unusually high last year. This is thought to be due to the high rainfall. We are not in the position to request SSE to change flows but we should have the opportunity to ask SSE for emergency flow if needed.

RW said that we have seen changed in the river, that it is more erratic and hard to predict. We need to keep an eye on it and need to request flows if required. SSE are receptive for flow suggestions.

ACTION: All, keen an eye on flows.

3.3 OTHER

AC asked if NEPS is happening in 2026. RW is not sure yet. The MD Electrofishing report was discussed and AC asked if this information is used for conservation grading and if it takes into consideration genetic diversity. RW responded saying that genetic diversity is not taken into account but it is hoped to be in the future. The Beaully is still Grade 1.

ACTION: RW to speak to marine directorate regarding grading methodology.

The Boards site visit to the Orrin went well (further information on this can be read in the June 2025 biologist report on the Boards website).

RW to coming up with 4 projects relating to smolts to present to the Board for instruction. A lot of this will depend on SSE. We would need to see survival numbers through dams from SSE. Proposals to be agreed by the Board before SSE budget.

Beavers were discussed. RW has said that NatureScot are proactive to mitigate problems relating to beavers. A NatureScot monitoring group will be set up which will include RW. VR

confirmed that a beaver dam can be removed within 2 weeks. The Bailiffs are the eyes on the ground and are to monitor this. EH pointed out it can take a lot of man power to remove a beaver dam for it to be just rebuilt very quickly.

4. BAILIFF UPDATE

AS provided an update in line with the report in the 2025 Annual Report. 33 anglers were challenged on the lower beats for minor offences and only 1 was reported to be the police. This was turned down due to the inability to identify those involved.

There have been two further seal sightings. No dead smolts have been found. All the burns are clear and no issues were found.

Reece Paton, seasonal bailiff, is doing fine and AS is training him.

Poaching is consistent but is mainly tourists.

AS noted that a lot of people in high-vis gear have been seen. It is expected that when SSE work starts in the area the bailiff role will get busier and more liaison with the police may be needed.

5. SSE

CMc asked for an update on the legal agreement which was requested from SSE in November 2024. This has not yet been received. AC said that the Ness board have been the 'guinea pigs' for the new legal agreement. They received a draft revised agreement which were considered not suitable.

FSN asked if there are any indications on counter reports. RW has said that SSE have gone silent on this and no information has been received this year and incomplete information has been received for last year. FSN raised the option to go back to SEPA to ensure the fish lifts are being used and working correctly. AS said that the dam staff don't see any data regarding counts and they only inform AS when the staff physically see fish.

AC says we need formal confirmation from SSE that the lifts are working and for numbers. RW has said that this has been raised with SEPA but they seem to be satisfied with SSE informing the Board when they are not working. SEPA will be reviewing the hydro CAR licence.

Liaison with SSE has been poor since Ross Glover transitioned into a new role. It is hoped that now Chris Conroy has started, the SSE relationship will improve.

ACTION: HH to confirm liaison meeting with Chris Conroy.

6. BUDGET

HH provided an update on where we are with the budget and no concerns were raised at present.

7. OPERATIONAL MATTERS

7.1 VEHICLE UPDATE

The new truck that has been ordered does not have a delivery date yet.

7.2 STAFF TRAINING FOR CONTRACTS

Additional staff training is required for future contracts. RW is to do CSCS training.

7.3 COMPLAINTED PROCEDURE UPDATE

The updated compliance procedure was approved.

8. NBFT

A NBFT meeting is taking place on 26th June. There is a proposal that the Trust will be more active and have their remit widened to environmental matters such as the Findhorn and Spey. It is hoped that the BDSFB will be consulted. There is a vacancy to fill on the trust and CMc is happy to be considered as a Board representative.

RW has said that the Trust could be good for matters which the Board do not currently have much time for.

FSN is attending the NBFT meeting on the 26th June and will provide an update to the Board after.

9. BOARD VACANCY

There is a vacancy on the BDSFB and is to be filled by a lower proprietor. The only lower proprietor is Lovat Estate.

ACTION: HH to approach Lovat for their nomination.

10. AOCB

The licence to occupy the BDSFB office expires in September.

ACTION: AC to seek instruction from the Lower Beaully Fishing Syndicate on if it is to be renewed.

How consultations are responded to was discussed. Going forward RW and HH will provide a draft consultation responses to the Board for approval before submitting. CMc asked if we ever receive a response to our submissions to consultations which we do not.

ACTION: RW to speak with FMS regarding consultation responses then follow up with writing a letter if needed.

11. DATE OF NEXT MEETINGS

Both the September and December meeting dates need changed due to unavailability of various people. HH is to rearrange.