

This update summarises key work task progress since the last update 19 June 2025. The main tasks of the last three months have been to organise and carry out electro-fishing surveys on the R. Beaully and approach SSE with smolt study design ideas to see if they would help fund any of them. The electro-fishing report was finalised and LBFS ghillies are currently carrying out the adult sampling work. We heard we were successful in our seal licence application, we are waiting to hear if our gravel augmentation grant application has been successful. We have carried out Himalayan balsam control, finished off smolt trapping work (data entry, trap removal) and have a date to for a site visit with SEPA to discuss gravel augmentation.

1. Governance/ organisation

Policy docs: Update required on progress of 'DRAFT Staff, Volunteer and Board member manual V1' review **Action: HH-**outstanding.

Annual report: Final formatting completed by HH. Action: put on website.

Facilities:

- Roofbars fitted to van 7 Aug to allow kayak and kit transport.
- RW's phone contract ended in January and AS and RP have issues with their mobiles. **Action HH** to get new contract-outstanding.
- Petty cash card requested but Bell Ingram not able to deliver.

H+S and training:

- RP attended first aid course and SFCC electro-fishing course.
- RW passed CITB Safety on Construction site training. Due to sit e-learning training and assessment for contract work post-poned to next year. CSCS operative green cards required.
- RW to do A2CofC drone training this year, to increase drone competence.
- Bailiffing RA updated due to aggressive behaviour incident. 'Accessing INNS sites by Kayak or Canadian canoe' written. 'Invasive plant control using herbicide' and 'Canoe, kayak and dinghy work' updated for insurance requirements.
- Van tyres due to be replaced with hybrid tyres 1st Sep.
- RW damaged her achilles on 5th Aug (not work related) and is currently on crutches. To allow healing is currently on reduced hours, working from home but is technically on a 6 week sick note 😞

Budget/ finance:

- Contract work postponed to next year (Beaully- Peterhead OHL on behalf of rskbiocensus/ BAM nuttall/ SSEN)
- Recent data provided to AECOM, tricky procurement procedures. Action: Hamish.
- ERM and WSP Invoices paid.
- If successful in our funding bid to SSE Community Fund we will deliver protected species surveys in 2026).

Staffing:

- Callum has asked if ourselves and Ness would host a SISI member of staff for a year, ahead of the windfarm funded phase. Cromarty have been hosting for the last 3 years so it would make sense to say yes as part of the Cromarty-Ness-Beaully SISI team. **For discussion.**
- Working with Rivers Traineeship EOI submitted through FMS. If successful would be funded via SSEN community fund. Would involve a community element (e.g. education in schools or catchment music compilation with Feis Ros), but trainee could work with us April-September 2026 to help with smolts and efishing. Watch this space.

FMS: See [The Sway](#) newsletter for a summary of FMS activities. Attended FMS's regional meeting 27th Aug (all proprietors invited). The FMS hydro group is due to meet soon.

NBFT: Attended NBFT engagement event 26th June, and NBFT trustees meeting 23rd July. Also attended a chat with Cromarty Firth Environment Trust and Andrew Wallace on 20th August to discuss funding and collaboration. Vision and strategy to be finalised by NBFT AGM on 28th October. Initial plan is to get a development officer in for 2 years to carry out landowner and stakeholder engagement, and come up with a route forward (organisation, work plan and funding strategy). Have made a list of relevant actions in our FMP that could be handed over to NBFT if a revamp goes ahead. Emailed out latest update to board members 22nd Aug.

2. Work Plan Progress to address the Pressures (*=priority)

Fishery Management Plan: Both the [pdf](#) and [Storyboard](#) versions of the FMP are on the website.

***Bailiffing:** See AS' quarterly report.

***Sediment management:** We wait to see if we have been successful in our bid to SSE community fund for £31,000 for Hydro-morphology advice on gravel augmentation. The funding board are due to meet in September. We hope to improve the resilience of the salmon population on the Rivers Farrar and Beaully below the dams by restoring salmon spawning beds.

LBFS are also interested in the morphology of the Lower Beaully so liaison with them has occurred to see if their requests can be incorporated.

We have a date for a SEPA hydro-morphologist visit with Alasdair Matheson, to discuss best practise and show him Lower Beaully and Farrar, 7 Oct.

Successfully acquired protected species licence to carry out surveys in relation to gravel augmentation work.

***Smolt passage:**

- 2025 Smolt protocol received from Naveed (23rd July). Awaiting gate slot numbers. Meeting with SSE to review smolt run due 1st September.
- Smolt study ideas sent to SSE and comments received, costed by Andy at Wyre Micro Development. For a cost of c£20,000 we could install a PIT tag antennae at Kilmorack dam and look at adult return rate based on whether smolts headed out through the turbines or were released downstream of the dam. We could also look at emigration and survival rates of smolts through Loch Beannacharan and adult return rate to the Farrar by installing a PIT tag receiver at Beannacharan dam. Costed study ideas sent to the board 22nd Aug. SSE unlikely to fund. **For discussion.**

***Predation:** We heard on 17th July that we have been granted a seal licence for 2026-2028 Jan-March each year, due to the presence of Kilmorack dam blocking fish exit from predation pressure. We are waiting to hear about training dates.

- Marine Directorate's seal licensing process should be updated in September. Our review comments were submitted in March.
- Numerous seal sightings submitted to FMS reporting app since end of June (30 June, 3rd July, 15th, 18th, 27th) and 5th Aug.
- Bird licence application submitted to NatureScot 18th July as part of wider Moray Firth Piscivorous bird group. Most birds seen on Upper Beaully. Bird licence received.

Invasives (INNS)/ Scottish Invasive Species Initiative (SISI):

- Calum has asked if ourselves and Ness would host a SISI member of staff for a year, ahead of the windfarm funded phase. Cromarty have been hosting for the last 3 years.
- AMW partnership carried out their third year of JK control Beaully- Estuary 19th-20th Aug. This was funded by SISI at a cost of £2,106. NatureScot consent received to carry out this work on the edge of the SSSI/ SPA.
- Attended Beaully Balsam Basher meeting 8th July to co-ordinate work.
- 2 hrs picking at Ferry field (16th July), 2 hrs picking at Wester Lovat (23rd July) by kayak. Distribution much reduced. Volunteers carried out 90% of this work 😊 significant progress continues to be made.
- Mink caught at Beaufort estate 3 June (we last caught one in 2022)! Trudi successfully catching in neighbouring catchments (<20 this year so far).

Pink salmon: Pink salmon reported at >5 sites so far (Dee, Spey, Kyle of Sutherland, Tweed, Thurso). Reece/ Ali due to conduct a drone survey to see if any redds on lower Beauly, none caught or sighted so far on R. Beauly. It is a Pink salmon year so please be vigilant and report any sightings [here](#). Licence granted to enable removal and humane dispatch of pink salmon, please dispatch humanely if caught. More info in recent [FMS Pink Salmon alert doc](#).

Development/ consultations/ advice: Turns out we are not a statutory consultee for all developments (e.g. in the case of Fanellan and Black bridge upgrade), so next time we need to be more vigilant.

- [Bingally Overhead line uprating](#) (16th July)
- Data request from Paul S (LBFS) looking at stocking methods. Fish count data, rod catch, electro-fishing data for R. Beauly provided 14th July. Various phone calls signposting him to recent electrofishing report, hydromorphology reports and smolt information on the website.
- LBFS stocking query (28th Aug) See Appendix. **Any questions?**
- MD Sea trout sample frame update (29th July).
- LBFS underground cabling. Request received 1st July. Ongoing.

Hydro: Have received good communication from Chris regarding smolt study work and have a meeting with Chris and Naveed 1st September to review the smolt run, but no confirmation of a liaison meeting date so far.

Spoke to Ness and Conon fishery boards about general communication with SSE and access to dams.

Due to the numerous fish pass issues this season we have now requested regular access to the dams so we can check fish passage, smolt passage and deter poachers. Verbally SSE (Peter M) seem positive, but we need to make sure this actually happens.

Beavers: On 22nd August NatureScot issued licences for beaver release in Glen Affric by FLS (up to 4 families) and also Abriachan by the Abriachan Forest Trust (2 families).

The board submitted mitigation stipulations which should be included in the licence conditions. These were walkovers to identify and remove barriers in the Belladrum sub-catchment above areas we and LBFS currently check to allow fish passage. Also walkovers at the bottom of R. Cannich and R. Affric (as these are important salmon spawning areas), and Home and Kennel burns at the top of the catchment.

We also requested a small annual contribution to support our fish survey monitoring.

We will be on the monitoring group chaired by FLS.

We were approached by BBC Radio Scotland requesting a short interview, but as there are extremely mixed views held by proprietors it was decided that it wouldn't be a good idea. For more information see [NatureScot's press release](#).

Diffuse Pollution: Walkovers of Belladrum sub-catchment to assess diffuse pollution sources and identify relevant farms and crofts in need of help are planned for the Autumn. Funding may be sought from the Wild Fisheries Fund (for fencing and solar powered pumps). These may have to be conducted by drone rather than by foot due to RW's achilles injury. Permissions to be sort from landowners.

3. Monitoring Methods

Smolt output calculation: Updated smolt output calculations were conducted. Area based estimate suggests 36,288-66,378 smolts are produced each year, whilst adult return rates suggest 75,050-102,800. This compares to the previous NBFT estimate in 2007 of 91,251 smolts. The disparity between the estimate based on area Vs estimate based on fish counts suggests that we are producing more smolts than 3/100m² due to good juvenile survival to smolt. Am due to discuss this with the Conon.

Smolt monitoring:

- 2025 data input to excel
- See previous section: 'smolt passage'
- Rotary Screw trap finally removed from river 25th July (thanks to help of Jim and Erica). Delay due to low flows.

Fish Counts:

- Processing of last year's fish counts still to be done by SSE. No fish counts received for this season.
- Due to the numerous fish pass issues encountered this season we formally requested counts from SSE in a letter dated 28th August. We are yet to receive the counts. Informally, through verbal communications between Ali and SSE staff counts at Aigas were >1,000 on 25th Aug (low), and there have been issues with Kilmorack data downloads. This is unconfirmed.

Electro-fishing:

- [Electro-fishing report](#) including 2018-2024 data finalised and is on the website. The main messages are that based on the data we have, we have good juvenile densities, however there is a lack of data for Lower Beaully hence why this is the focus of this summer's surveys. Comparison with historic data showed no significant difference in fry or parr numbers compared to 1990s. The [Marine Directorate report](#) suggests that the Beaully catchment has sufficient adult returners to saturate the juvenile habitat for the time being.
- Emailed MD to ask if juvenile data would be included in future Conservation gradings, and requested clarification on how the Beaully was plotted on the stock recruitment curve (Figure 25 in MD report). i.e. area used. It may be possible to get a rod catch figure associated with saturation of juvenile habitat.
- 11 surveys complete with contractor Erica and volunteers Anne and Steve prior to 6th Aug. 2 E Deanie burn showed salmon parr to be present, no fry. 3 Upper Beaully, 6 Lower Beaully surveys complete by us. Analysis will be carried out once all surveys complete. Lots of juvenile elvers found.
- Due to RW unable to do fieldwork since 6th Aug, survey work has been handed over to Ness Fishery Board to deliver- **Thank you Ness Fishery Board!!** The plan will deliver a total of 20 sites Lower Beaully, 10 sites Upper Beaully. Good progress made so far, hope to have surveys complete by 5th Sep (water level dependent). By the end of the summer we should have a better idea of what's going on on the R. Beaully, as to date only 4 historic sites exist.
- RSKbiocensus contract work was postponed at short notice til next year.
- More office time could mean RW can finally enter the 2019 NEPs data, and correct 2023 data in SFCC database..??

Predation monitoring, seal: Reporting of specialist seal presence in the river continues in the [FMS reporting app](#).

Drone: Pink salmon redd survey due to be conducted by Ali/ Reece.

Aiming to survey and produce mappable output of both rivers below the dams in relation to gravel augmentation work as a baseline in January 2026. Have included cost of Mavic 3 enterprise drone required for this work in SSE funding application, could otherwise borrow Chris D and his drone to do the work from the Ness (see below).

Drone users meeting due 17th September.

National adult Sampling: LBFS Ghilies currently delivering this project but low numbers sampled so far.

Temperature loggers: due to be downloaded. Replacement loggers received from MD.

Protected species: Thanks to additional training/ help from the Ness board a licence was issued by NatureScot 3rd July (2025-2029) to enable us to carry out protected species surveys. This was requested to enable us to carry out surveys in relation to habitat restoration (gravel augmentation) work and contract work. This would also help enable us/ NBFT to embark on protected species re-invasion work if necessary in the future.

People: Community engagement, participation and heritage

Oral History Project: Printing request sent to Highland printers. **Action RW** more amendment to borders required before printing is possible.

Website: Updated with Electrofishing summary report 2018-2024, IBFC genetics report (2021-2024), Senior Biologist update June 2025, and HH updated with Annual report (2024/25).

Social media:

- Reporting pacific salmon, (AS), Bailiffing (AS), Catch and Release (AS), Balsam pulling, smolt trap removal and fish surveys (RW), Balsam volunteering days (Trudi).

Proprietors:

- Various chats with Paul S (LBFS), LBFS chairman and Gavin H (LBFS).
- Update emails re fish pass outages.
- FMS regional meeting invite (4th Aug).

Incidents: Aigas fish pass outage 21st July-25th July

Aigas fish pass partial filling (10th-18th Aug, manual lifts 19th-22nd).

Beannacharan fish pass outage 22nd Aug-ongoing

Letter prepared by Hamish sent to SSE (29th Aug) requesting fish counts, more detailed inspection of fish passes ahead of each season, and access to the top of the dams. Access to top of the dams verbally agreed by Peter M in conversation with Ali, 25th Aug. This would bring Beaully access to dams broadly in line with the Ness and Conon catchments.

Numerous emails and phone calls to keep proprietors updated, extra correspondence and communication with FSN, Erchless (Tom), Glass (Maeve).

Written Outputs: LBFS stocking query response, LBFS morphology work liaison, NBFT and costed smolt study ideas email to board 22nd Aug, Efish survey plan for Ness board, [FINAL Efish report](#), Protected species licence application, SSE smolt study ideas, AMW contract, fish eating bird licence supporting docs and licence return. SISI quarterly claim, [Working with Rivers 2026 Trainee EOI](#)

Meetings: FMS Regional meeting, NBFT (26th June, 23rd July, 20th Aug), Board meet and Annual proprietors meeting (25th June), SALMOVE update (8th July), Beaully Balsam Basher meeting (8th July), Plantlife eels (14th July), Kieren NatureScot beavers (phone, 5th Aug). Al Reeves (Dee stocking chat 27th Aug).

Many fresh elvers found on Lower Beaully during fish surveys



APPENDIX- A note on stocking

I have included this email response (28th August) as LBFS were asking about the licensing around stocking and board members should be aware of the current guidance.

Hello Alec,

To my knowledge DSFBs can permit the release of fish, but consent is also needed from Marine Directorate to take broodstock out of the river.

Stocking should be seen as the last tool in the toolbox once all other issues have been fixed, otherwise stocking can be ineffective. In the case of the Lower Beaully, fixing the degraded habitat issue caused by Kilmorack dam would be the first step (and seeing what we've got in terms of fish monitoring) and we are actively working on this. There are many variations as to how stocking can take place.

Stocking is not encouraged where there is a viable wild population. A DSFB has to make sure the risks to wild fish are minimised. The stocking powers of a DSFB can be taken away if stocking is irresponsible.

The lowest risk approach would be to recondition kelts (collect kelts after spawning, recondition in salt water e.g. Tay). There are other options too e.g. harvest smolts and grow on to adults as they are trialling on the Dee, fry re-distribution, stocking of eyed ova (see [NASCO stocking guidelines](#) and recent minutes from the [Wild Salmon Strategy and Evidence board](#)). I have also attached a [recent evidence review](#) and [MD's stocking policy](#).

High standards of husbandary are required, and biosecurity is a key issue. A biosecurity/ aquaculture product licence may be required from Fish Health Inspectorate. SEPA are also involved with licencing hatcheries.

Depending on what is proposed, considerable monitoring and genetic sampling may be required to assess the success of a stocking programme and to ensure that fish are put in the right place to minimise risk of watering down the genetics of the wild population. Cost is also another key consideration.

I hope this helps,
Thanks,
Ruth