

Beauly District Fishery Board Board Meeting

Date: 5th September 2025

Location: Bidwells, Ness Meeting Room/By Microsoft Teams

Attendees: Alastair Campbell (AC), Ali Skinner (AS), Charles McAndrew (CM), Donald Fraser (DF), Eugenie Haniel (EH), Hamish Hope (HH), Jim Braithwaite (JB) and Ruth Watts (RW).

MINUTES

1. Apologies

Victoria Rotheroe was not in attendance.

2. Minutes of the Board Meeting June 2025

Minor changes were made. The minutes were then agreed and approved. Actions from the June 2025 meeting were discussed, and updates were covered in the relevant sections below.

3. Bailiff Update

AS confirmed that protective vests and body cameras are now in use following a near-miss incident with poachers. The poachers were known, and police have been contacted.

AS highlighted that there will be a large number of subcontractors in the area due to national infrastructure projects. The BDSFB must ensure that all contractors and companies involved are aware that no fishing is permitted without a valid permit.

JB suggested that all information regarding bailiffing and fishing should be included in subcontractor induction information packs.

Action: AC to provide HH with contact details to allow liaison with SSE regarding subcontractor information.

AS has gained access to Aigas Dam; however, no fish were observed passing through. AS noted that poaching activity this year is similar to last year.

4. Biologist Report

RW discussed hosting a SISI member of staff for one year. The position would be fully funded by SISI, with a potential 30% payment to the Board for hosting. This could be beneficial in the long term. SISI work has made good progress so far. The post would last one year, possibly two. If the Beaully Board does not take the opportunity, the Ness may.

Action: RW to request further information regarding hosting the SISI member of staff, focusing on what is covered and contributions towards equipment, vehicle use, etc. RW to provide an update via email once information is received.

RW highlighted two potential smolt studies but noted that the preferred option is the Kilmorack Dam PIT study (details in the August 2025 Biologist Update on the BDSFB website). The estimated cost is approximately £20,000. Disappointingly, SSE has no funding available to support the study, but their assistance will be needed to access the dam for equipment installation. There may be scope for academic or third-party funding, which could also make SSE more interested in supporting the project.

AC mentioned that the LBFS committee is developing a project plan to rejuvenate the river, aligning well with the Board's aims. This plan will be shared with the Board once available.

The goal is to have the smolt study ready for spring 2026; however, involvement from multiple stakeholders (Marine Directorate, SSE, SEPA, funders, WMD, staffing) may delay this to spring 2027. LBFS is supportive of helping to prepare for a 2026 start. CM noted that proprietors of the Glass would also be supportive.

Action: RW to explore funding options and look more broadly at potential funding sources for a smolt study.

Action: RW to prepare a more detailed Kilmorack PIT tagging study to share with the Board before circulating it to all proprietors. Target: six weeks for feedback.

RW noted that the Ness and Beaully Fishery Trust (NBFT) is developing a vision for its future structure. An AGM will outline this in more detail. RW has been contributing to this work, as it is expected to be beneficial to the Board. CM asked what the benefits would be to fishing. RW explained that good land management and improved habitats will indirectly benefit fish and overall river health.

There are discussions about appointing a Development Officer to assess whether one trust (for both the Ness and Beaully) or two separate trusts would be most effective. CM said he could be interested in joining the trust once the role and scope are clearer.

The bird licence has been received, and marksmen were discussed.

4.1 Seals

The seal licence has been issued, and marksmen were discussed. The marksmen course has not yet been scheduled.

Action: RW and HH to continue chasing for the marksmen course.

5. SSE

RW met with Naveed and Chris of SSE regarding the multiple fish pass breakdown at the dams. HH wrote to SSE expressing the Board's concern and is awaiting a response. RW has asked SSE for more information on dam maintenance and frequency. SSE will provide fish counts will be provided to the Board imminently. Fish catch numbers are very low this year but river levels are generally normal due to being a hydro river. RW highlighted that catches have been low across the country.

Temperature loggers were discussed and more temperature loggers may be considered.

The timings of fish lifts were discussed. RW highlighted that the more lifts put in, the more likely the equipment will breakdown. EH suggested that the lifts could be kept at three times a day but have them spread out further throughout the day. CM brought attention to the fact that previously night time lifts were not successful. JB suggested that SSE take into account elongated daylight periods over the summer and spread out the fish lift activity evenly over the de facto daylight periods. This is to be raised with SSE at the next liaison meeting.

Concerns of SSE flows was raised and their potential danger. DF said that historically the flows were beneficial to the angler but this is no longer the case. AC said that the only way that SSE would change flows would be for the requirement of fish passage.

AS requires more access to SSE dams for bailiffing purposes to ensure passes are working correctly. RW confirmed that in her meeting with Naveed and Chris, they confirmed that AS access is needed to be prearranged and accompanied by SSE. AS, as bailiff, has statutory powers to access a dam to check passes if it is suspected they are not working correctly. AS has already done the required Health and Safety required.

It is expected that SSE will provide the update smolt protocol by the next liaison meeting. Historically SSE previously joined Board meetings and we are to make the offer going forward to try and encourage good communication. SSE have not come to Board meetings for many years which resulted in the twice annually liaison meetings being introduced.

EH and JB highlighted there are very unhappy fishing members and ghillies due to low number of fish which is thought to be partially caused by broken down fish passes. The

Upper Beauly is being fished hard by very competent fishers and still very low numbers. CM said the Glass is the same. We do not know the full reason of low fish numbers.

JB has said that the Beauly Angling Club may be writing to SSE regarding unseasonal flows, RW will have sight of this before it is sent.

Action: HH to continue to discussions with SSE regarding a SSE/Board liaison meeting and chase for a written response.

Action: RW to chase fish numbers and smolt protocol if they are not received.

Action: In SSE liaison meeting we need to discuss the potential change of fish lift timings throughout the season and how their flows are effecting fish passage.

Action: HH to start inviting SSE to Board meetings.

6. Conservation Grading Consultation

The conservation grading consultation is live until 7th September 2025. RW has drafted a response and circulated to the Board for approval. RW said up until this point we have been asking for the assessment method to be more accurate by including fish counts. If fish pass numbers are considered, it needs to be raised that there has been issues with the equipment.

RW thinks the conservation grading will drop anyway in the coming years based on recent average rod catches.

The Board were happy with RW draft response and confirmed it is to be submitted.

7. Ballach Wind Farm

It is disappointing that our responses to consultations are not considered at the statutory level.

Tom Chetwynd, agent for Erchless, raised an initial concern via email on how the Board potentially responds to planning applications based on how Anthony Watkins (biologist while RW was on maternity leave) commented on the scoping stage of Ballach Wind Farm planning application. It was found that the Board did not make an objection but provided a comment only.

CM has said that the role of the Board is to protect fishing and our job is to protect the fish and that we are within our rights to respond to planning applications that could impact fish without consulting all proprietors. AC says that our focus should be on the fish.

AC suggested RW look at the application, the previous comments raised by Anthony Watkins and express these concerns to the planning authorities/applicant.

EH let the Board know that there is an online page to object to the Ballach Wind Farm suitable for private individuals to sign.

AC raised the question of if the Board should act as an Objector or to provide comments/mitigation advice on to limit risk to the fish and river. This needs to be

considered on a case by case basis to increase the chance of the best outcome for the fish. CM agreed, and in the Ballach Wind Farm case we need to write to find out what measures have been taken/considered regarding fish. EH suggested that we should stress that the fish in question are endangered.

Action: RW look at the planning application and the previous comments raised by Anthony Watkins then express concerns to the planning authorities/applicant on how it will impact fish.

8. Financial Report

HH spoke through the final position to date. The Board are currently in a better position than forecasted but this may change by the end of the year.

HH to prepare the 2026 budget by the end of October 2025 for the Board to discuss.

CM asked if we are any closer to knowing if we are going to receive NEPS payment for 2026. RW said that we do not know yet but there is a meeting due to take place regarding this but the date has not confirmed.

Action: HH to have a financial projection prepared for the end of the year and then circulate it to the Board.

9. Operational Matters

9.1 Vehicles

The new pick up truck is expected in October 2025.

9.2 Board Vacancy

There is still a vacant Board position for a lower proprietor.

Action: HH to speak with Lovat Estate again about their nomination for the position as the only lower proprietor.

10. AOCB

HH notified the Board that Robert Whitson, the Bell Ingram Partner in Beauly, is leaving the firm at the end of 2025. This was highlighted due to the agreement between the Board and Bell Ingram.

CM asked HH how he is finding the Clerk role.

AC confirmed that the BDSFB office will continue to operate monthly from its current premises.

EH requested RW to compile an excel sheet to keep track of any and all funding/grant requests. Once compiled, this is to be updated on an ongoing basis.

Action: RW to compile an excel spreadsheet to keep track of past and present funding/grant requests.

11. Date of next meeting and public meeting

Next Board meeting and public meeting expected to take place on 9th December 2025. HH may not be present due to paternity leave but suitable representation from Bell Ingram will attend on his behalf.

Action: HH to find/arrange suitable meeting location with suitable remote access provisions.