

This update summarises key work task progress since the last update 1 September 2025. The main tasks of the last three months have been to respond to various planning applications associated with electricity transmission infrastructure. Prepare the smolt trap and truck study proposal and source funding. Sediment management work is moving forwards through a visit from SEPA and imminent visit from KAYA consultancy. I am yet to get on to the important task of writing the Efish report for use by us, KAYA and LBFS, I should get on to this shortly. The focus of the next few months will be on writing the efish report, procuring/ altering kit for the smolt work and hopefully exploring smolt passage improvement options for Loch Beannacharan. Time also needs to be spent finding a new office and recruitment of seasonal staff.

1. Governance/ organisation

Policy docs: Environmental policy and Equality and Diversity policy now finalised as a result of grant applications. Fair work First policy written and approved.

Facilities:

-The search is on for a new office as LBFS lease is being terminated. There is space above Co-op, possible space at Muir of Ord and storage containers at Muir of Ord. Potential options at Dochfour business park. Interim measure would be to find an office space for RW only, however it is essential we have an office if we are to host seasonal staff (e.g. seasonal SISI officer, seasonal trainee) and deliver our work program. The implications on the budget are significant and this is likely to impair our capacity to deliver projects/ employ a seasonal bailiff/ carry out focussed monitoring. Have requested clarification from AC on why they need us out, **would LBFS re-consider or let us store our kit at Corff?**

-Hybrid van tyres now fitted, but spare needs putting on rim. Minor damage in storm Amy (back side door won't open).

-HH plans to move us over to Giffgaff for SIM only contract and internet, so that any missed bills do not affect staff credit ratings. Vodafone very difficult to deal with and new phones required.

-The joint FMS application to the Marine Fund for bailiffing kit and a **thermal drone** was successful!! Timescales for receiving kit has not been received yet. Apart from improved bailiffing, the drone should allow us to monitor fish and habitat 😊

H+S and training:

-RW due to sit e-learning training and assessment by December for contract work in 2026. Seasonal efish help will also have to do this training. CSCS operative green cards required.

-RW to do A2CofC drone training before 13 Feb, to increase drone competence.

Budget/ finance:

[List of funders](#) put together (8th Sep). We should consider applying to funds through NBFT to make success more likely.

-Contract work planned for 2026 (Beaul- Peterhead OHL on behalf of rskbiocensus/ BAM nuttall/ SSEN) £8,000. Potential for this to be extended to include monitoring associated with underground cabling at Black bridge (Lewis-Fanellan) and Black bridge re-build (Fanellan). All are SSEN transmission projects. Have requested this in recent meeting with SSEN re Lewis-Fanellan cabling.

-Past funding sources summary circulated around board members for info. (4th Nov).

Staffing:

-Anticipate hosting seasonal SISI officer in 2026 if we have an office. Recruitment planned for January. **30% overheads will be covered- so would pay c>£4,000 towards office cost.**

-Working with Rivers Trainee application submitted (29 Oct) through FMS and NatureScot (funded by SSEN community fund). If successful we would host a 6 month trainee (May-October) to help deliver the smolt trap and truck trial and efishing. As a stipulation of the funder, the trainee would deliver some education to local schools too (efish demo, invertebrates), this could be independently or through Aigas Field centre.

-Probably can't afford a seasonal bailiff due to increased office costs??? **Board to consider**

FMS: See [The Sway](#) newsletter for a summary of FMS activities. Attended FMS AGM 19th Nov. Governance documents have been updated. Induction process for board members in the pipeline. Scottish Rivers Fund due to be launched in 2026. **Action RW** to send list of costed projects (sediment management, smolt trap and truck study, Beannacharan whoosh solution), although tricky to fund as really this should be SSE mitigation money. The FMS hydro group met 11th Nov. A general feeling of positivity around the SSE staff change and things moving forward in individual catchments. Due to meet with SEPA in January for an update on the Hydro review.

NBFT: NBFT AGM attended 18 Nov. The new [Vision for the Trust](#) is a working document. Board approval is required to make constitutional changes (move away from a stipulation of 2 Beauly board, and 2 Ness board trustees) to allow greater trustee diversity and free the trust. If successful, new trustees will be recruited in the New Year. A functioning trust will bring multiple benefits to the R. Beauly catchment and Fishery Board. Have made a [list of relevant actions](#) in our FMP that could be handed over to NBFT if a revamp goes ahead. **See [NBFT-Board paper](#) prepared by Brian (Ness Fishery Board).**

-Attended the Director's meeting of other Fishery Boards at the Tay (18 Sep).

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

Our Fishery Management Plan is on the website ([pdf](#) and storyboard).

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

***Sediment management:** We hope to improve the resilience of the salmon population on the Rivers Farrar and Beauly below the dams by restoring salmon spawning beds and associated juvenile habitat.

We found out on 26 Sep, that our SSE Community fund application (£31,000) was unsuccessful to pay for hydro-morphology advice for gravel augmentation (as well as a monitoring drone, and FWPM surveys for both rivers). LBFS are keen to restore the Lower Beauly, so are now funding and project managing the KAYA work for the Lower Beauly only. KAYA final work request in liaison with LBFS (Gavin) submitted, existing knowledge submitted to KAYA during project hand-over, 2025 spawning location information provided to KAYA in liaison with GA (24 Nov). Efish report to be provided to KAYA once complete.

We are pursuing gravel augmentation advice through SEPA for the R. Farrar and Lower Beauly. Alasdair Matheson (SEPA hydromorphologist) visited on 7 Oct. Initial findings shared with LBFS and Culligan estate. AM saw most of the Farrar, another visit is required to complete a look at the R. Beauly. Awaiting advice email from SEPA to share with KAYA and appropriate proprietors (LBFS or Culligan estate). SEPA flow data has been obtained for the Farrar to help assess the appropriate course of action on the Farrar, but awaiting Beauly flow data from SSE.

***Smolt passage:**

-Refined [project proposal for trial trap and truck](#) mitigation sent to SSE ahead of liaison meeting. Limited advice received from Marine Directorate and NatureScot, Conon and KOS fishery boards consulted. Visit below dam, various quotes gained, method refined, estimated smolt numbers refined, risks controlled. Proposal is on the website. Grant application submitted to Orri for smolt transport kit (unsuccessful). [Grant application](#) submitted for smolt transport kit to Highland Nature Restoration Fund (£6262.90, we wait to hear in December). If successful we can procure kit from mid January and hire contractor help. If unsuccessful the board will have to consider covering the cost. The aim is to get the much larger cost for the PIT tag decoder covered by external funding or proprietors as a back-up. The PIT tag decoder order would have to be submitted by June to allow plenty of time for installation over the winter. So we need to demonstrate that the project is practically deliverable to SSE and secure funding by June 2026.

-Gate slot smolt numbers received for spring 2025, shows peak numbers were up at 700 on 22 May (Aigas G1) prior to 2 nights of high generation. We have repeated our wish that it would be better to avoid a situation like this in the future by generating more at night during the smolt run rather than leaving numbers to build up/ delay smolts to then flush them out. SSE re-iterated that due to the dry conditions this spring they did not have 'spare' water to generate with. SSE have agreed to provide generation data under a non disclosure agreement. We hope this can lead to refinements being made to the smolt protocol.

-It is well known that smolts struggle to find their way out of hydro lochs, especially if pike inhabit the loch, and there is no attraction flow for smolts to find an exit route. This is the case at Loch Beannacharan where smolts have to find their way out down the fish pass. Following trial work on the Conon to improve smolt passage out of Loch Meig (a similar situation) we should look into mitigation in the form of [improving attraction flow](#) to the top of the fish pass. **The start of a solution to improve smolt passage out of Loch Beannacharan is being explored.** **Action RW:** to discuss with Conon, relevant proprietors, and SSE to agree a way forward in January.

- *Predation:** Seal Marksperson training has still not been confirmed, however our marksperson has been nominated to MD (HH).
- Use of our Acoustic Deterrent Device continues, ghillies using this less due to limited effectiveness, although essential they continue to support the next seal licence application.
- 'Targeted Acoustic Startle Technology' (sonar triggered deterrent) being trialled by SMRU (N Esk and Dee).

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

- Apart from the Japanese knotweed treated by contractor AMW, Trudi treated Japanese knotweed at Guisachan, Glass burn, Struy, Bridgend, Lentran, Orchard park, Ferry point, Eilean Aigas (5m lance). Could not do Wester Lovat due to Ruth's achilles injury and question mark over insurance. Now resolved so a priority to treat in 2026.
- 2 mink captured in Beauly catchment this year so far since expansion of network to coastal burns.
- Network rail have said they are treating the JK at Bunchrew railway crossing.
- The SISI project is officially continuing for another 2 years and probably beyond thanks to conditional funding secured from the offshore windfarm developer and NatureScot NRF. If we are to host a seasonal SISI officer in 2026 we need to find a new office. New partnership agreements to be prepared and signed in due course.
- SISI claim (Jul-Sep) submitted 8 Oct.

Riparian trees: Agreement with Braulen estate staff to locate their set quota of boxed trees close to the banks of the Misge, in liaison with Denis (Bidwells). **Action:** RW to visit before March to advise on precise locations.

Pink salmon: Possible Pink salmon redds spotted by GA via drone and destroyed. Reported to FMS (22 Sep). c2 were identified at Greenbank on 3/09/2025, and also 1 redd tail of Ripple on 18/09/2025.

Development/ consultations/ advice:

- River gradings consult [response](#) (5th Sep). MD responded (27 Oct) saying they are exploring a data sharing agreement with SSE for fish counts, they will make the assessment method easier to find, they are looking at how the adult sampling data will feed in. Consultation report will be published on SG website by end of year.
- Advice sent to Braulen estate re freshets (9 Sep)
- [Ballach](#) windfarm response (15 Sep)
- [Fanellan](#) transmission station- additional information response (3 Nov).
- [Beaulay-Peterhead overhead line](#) (13 Nov), FMS responded too.
- [Lewis-Fanellan underground cabling](#) (21 Nov)
- [NatureNetworks](#). Highland Council are linking up existing protected areas through 'NatureNetworks' to create wildlife corridors and increase ecosystem resilience. Our priority would ideally be to link up upland areas (cross catchment), the Moray Firth as a whole, and the river corridor. We fed into the process, and most of the river is now covered in the [draftNatureNetwork](#) to be submitted to Scottish Government in Feb 2026. This should help improve our chances of securing funding for conservation projects on the river (and has already been included in our Highland Nature restoration Funding application for smolt trap and truck kit).
- Charlie stocking/ juvenile densities query (tbc).
- Moray Flow park on the horizon....

Hydro: A positive SSE liaison meeting was had on 5th Nov, when we officially met Chris Conroy (newish SSE Fish specialist). We discussed the smolt trap and truck trial, Sediment management, and fish passage/ counter issues. See [minutes](#).

Beavers: Beavers released to G. Affric 24th Oct. [Press release](#). The board is on the monitoring group chaired by FLS. Contact the local Beaver Officer, Tobias, for anti-chew paint to protect trees. He can also paint trees for you (07926718338, tobias@treesforlife.org.uk).

Diffuse Pollution: The Belladrum catchment diffuse pollution walkovers are currently on hold due to other priority work.

3. Monitoring Methods

Smolt monitoring: We plan to run the trap for 2 months in spring 2026, as part of trial trap and truck work, this is pending funding for trap and truck kit and seasonal staffing/ contractor. See 'Smolt passage' in previous section for more info.

Adult fish: Cold spell has triggered fish spawning behaviour. Seen on Lower Beauly from around 25th Nov. Not seen on Farrar yet.

-Fish counts Distributed to all proprietors throughout the summer in relation to fish pass issues and 7th Nov. Kilmorack figures are a significant undercount due to data transfer issues. Aigas pretty good:

	Kilmorack	Aigas	Beannacharan
2025	1424	2826	229
2024	3450	2186	220
2023	2691	2834	38
2022	4982	3334	222
2021	3075	2896	127
2020	3374	2864	144
2019	2329	1723	40
2018	2731	2170	212
2017	4279	0	276
2016	4376	4183	301
2015	4374	3905	251
5yr average (using complete data only)	3948	3298	185
Green = no known issues			

Assurance from SSE that they want to provide accurate fish counts to stakeholders, the process of making the AI system work as a whole is taking longer than they would like.

-National adult Sampling: LBFS Ghillies delivered 7 samples, well short of the 60 required. This knocks us off the second highest spot in Scotland for numbers of samples. Samples, data and invoice submitted (7 Nov) for a much reduced amount (£3,335). To be split (£1,000 board, £2,335 LBFS). This data will feed into the river grading system so numbers submitted will have to be better next year.

Drone: Drone due to be used to observe spawning salmon/ confirm spawning locations once conditions are right (low flow, light). Aiming to conduct drone flyover using GA's drone December- January. A date for receiving our new drone is yet to be confirmed. Test flight conducted with Jim's drone 25 Nov.

Electro-fishing:

-Ness fishery board completed the efish surveys on the R. Beauly. This data was summarised and sent to LBFS with initial interpretation (16 Sep).

-Efish report due to be written, essential this is done in time to feed in to KAYA report. Sites set-up in database, data due to be entered in database. **Priority Action:** RW to write the report.

-the 2025 sites have been run through the updated NEPs tool, but a few glitches need to be resolved.

-The [final Farrar genetics report](#) has shown that twice the number of fish are spawning below Beannacharan dam compared to above despite there being more potential spawning area above the dam (165,700m² above compared to 124,369m² below). This is likely to imply that there are issues with upstream adult passage OR (as demonstrated in other catchments) downstream smolt passage. The seed of a solution to help smolts find their way out of Loch Beannacharan has been found. See 'Smolt passage' section above.

-MD response received to email sent 25 Aug. Juvenile data will not be included in the Conservation gradings process, an updated version of the NEPS tool has now been released which allows analysis of juvenile data for wide mainstem rivers (i.e. the Lower Beauly), details provided of wetted area used to create Figure 25 of NEPS report.

-draft 2026 plans involve re-survey of R. Beauly especially as this coincides with contract work planned (Beaulay- Peterhead OHL, underground cable). Surveys will need to be done of wider catchment too dependent on staffing resource.

-RW still to enter the 2019 NEPs data, and correct 2023 data in SFCC database a winter job if time allows.

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

-Next piscivorous bird count due in January.

Temperature loggers: All 3 loggers downloaded and re-installed (3 Sep). Issues downloading Tomich data. Data sent to MD. See Appendix for data in relation to fish lift timings.

People: Community engagement, participation and heritage

Oral History Project: amendment to borders required before printing is possible, **Action RW** (on hold).

Website: Updated with Farrar genetics report, the last Senior Biologist update (20 Oct) and Fair Work First Policy (25 Nov).

Social media:

- Annual Public meeting (HH), Salmon spawning looksy (AS), Burn clearing (AS), Close season (AS), Sediment management visit (RW), Sluice gates open (AS), Aigas mink trap (Trudi), Bailiffing Farrar, upper catchment (AS), Water temps (RW).

Proprietors:

- Paul Jarman (LBFS chairman) and Gavin H (LBFS).
- Charlie general chat
- Update emails re fish counts.
- Frank (Farrar) re potential Whoosh solution for smolt passage and general update

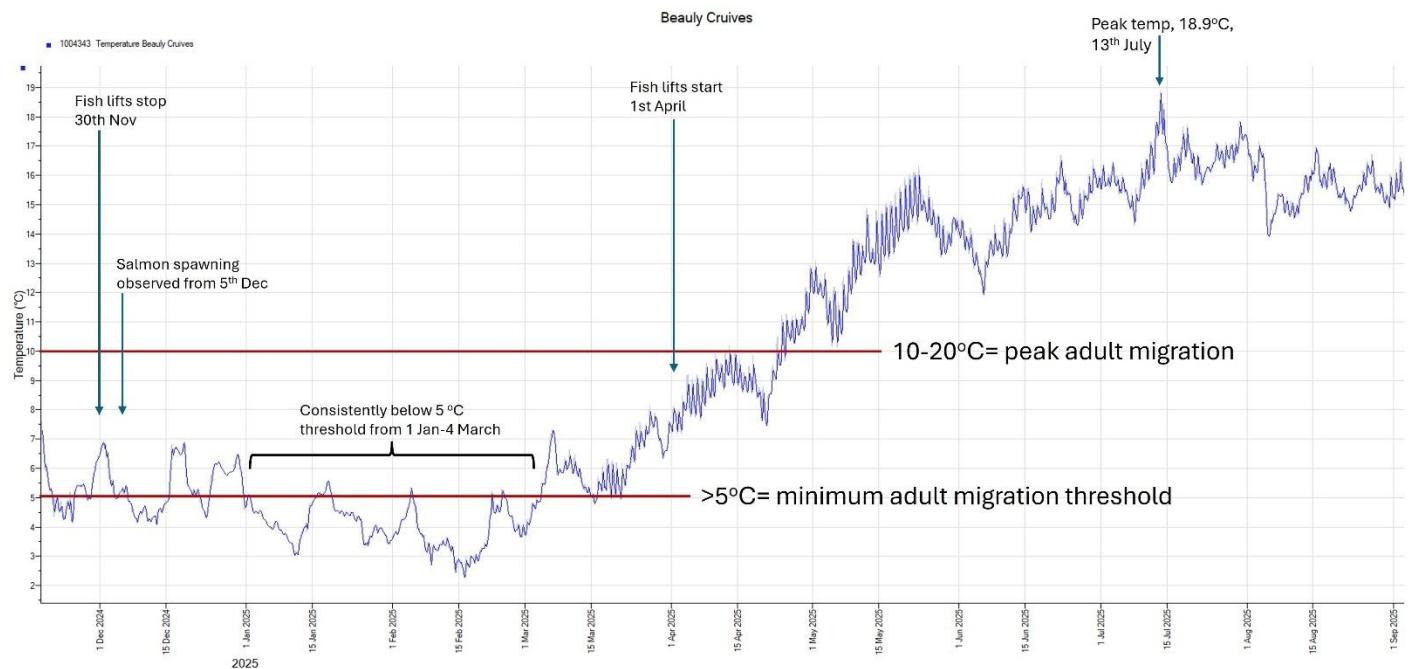
Incidents: Aigas fish pass outage 13 Sep- 15 Sep

Bruaich engineering, investigated 30th October, summary created and reported to SEPA 3 November, who are investigating.

Meetings/ chats: SSE smolt run meeting (1st Sep), Charlie (9 Oct). Alison AST (9 Oct), WSFT/ Skye FT (10 Oct), IBFC Farrar meeting (16th Oct), Brian Shaw- smolt transport (16th Oct). Aigas Field centre (3 Nov), NatureNetworks HC (4 Nov), SSE liaison meeting (5th Nov), Hamish catch ups x3. FMS hydro group (11 Nov), FMS Beauly-Peterhead OHL (11 Nov), PIT tag user-group meeting (12th Nov), FMS AGM (19 Nov), SSEN/RGMcleod Lewis- Fanellan cabling meeting (21 Nov),



APPENDIX- Temperature logger data, R. Beauly at Cruives



Current temperature regime suggests that in an ideal world it would be good to extend the fish lift operation to 1st Jan, starting again 1st March, however, operationally, increased lift duration results in more wear and tear and increased likelihood of breakdowns...

Consideration could be given to switching lifts to nighttime as adult salmon are more predisposed to migrating at night, however previous comms with SSE (Alastair Steven) was that fish didn't use the lifts at night.....

