

Beaully District Fishery Board Board Meeting

Date: 9th December 2025

Location: Lovat Arms, Beaully, IV4 7BS & Microsoft Teams

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

Partial Attendance: Neil Cameron (NC) & Brian Shaw (BS).

MINUTES

1. Apologies

Ali Skinner was not in attendance.

2. Minutes of the Board Meeting September 2025

No amendments were made and minutes were approved. EH asked for a colour differentiation for public and private copies of minutes.

AC ran through the action points of September 2025 and the following was confirmed:

AC provided HH with relevant contact details to allow liaison with SSE regarding subcontractors in the area.

The Board would like to host a SISI member of staff in principle. RW said we will need to have a secure office space to do this. AC highlighted the potential employers liability in hosting a SISI member of staff and any contract would need to be explicitly clear that the role is seasonal and not permanent. It is thought that all associated costs would be covered.

CM would not be interested in joining the Ness and Beaully Fishery Trust as he wishes to focus on fish and not wider environmental projects.

RW and HH have not yet heard of a seals marksmen course. It is assumed our nominated marksmen is appropriately qualified and there will be no issues. HH awaiting for a further document from Marine Directorate.

RW to share with the Board communication regarding Ballach.

Lovat Estate nominated Donald Fraser as their Board member. The Board agreed to this.

Action: HH to chase Marine Directorate for marksmen course and further documentation.

Action: RW to share with the Board communication regarding Ballach.

3. Bailiff Update

The Bailiff update was provided to the Board prior to the meeting and is available on the Boards website. There were no questions relating to the update.

4. Biologist Report

The Biologist report was provided to the Board prior to the meeting and is available on the Boards website. RW stated the electrofishing report will be started shortly and shared at the earliest opportunity.

The discussion focused on smolts. RW informed the Board that a funding application has been successful which will fund the relevant kit for smolt transport for the trap and truck trial in 2026.

RW has submitted a full PIT Tagging project proposal to SSE. The intention is to trap 8000 smolts in total, 4000 to tag and 4000 to move via trap and truck. Previous trap figures do not suggest this level of smolts will be achievable, however RW has spoken with the Marine Directorate who have agreed that the total number can be staggered over a few years. CM stated that statistically it would be best to do the whole amount in one year than across many. The intention would be to trial trap smolts in 2026 and then trap and tag in 2027. It is hoped the PIT tag decoder would be installed on a dam with agreement from SSE.

Action: RW to share an email to the Board from Iain Malcolm regarding staggering years.

AC spoke of a discussion that took place in the Lower Beaully Fishing Syndicate meeting and suggested that if a sufficient number of smolts are caught in 2026, tagging should be done in 2026 and potentially place the decoder elsewhere. RW strongly suggested that Aigas Dam is likely the best option and preferred location for the decoder. Other locations were discussed but deemed unsuitable on account of the depth of the water or breadth of the river which would result in the requirement for more than one decoder resulting in interference which would impact data collection. RW assured the Board that WMD as technical kit supplied is considered the best option.

RW outlined why there were no other suitable locations for the decoder and reiterated that it would be preferential to wait until 2027 to start tagging. Fish mortality was discussed for if tagging began in 2026 which would be low, around 1%, but it would cause the fish stress.

Other options were discussed such as genetic sampling but PIT tagging would be the best route if funding is available from a tagging could start in early 2026. The stress caused to smolts by handling them was discussed. General consensus was reached that this would be unavoidable as PIT tagging would likely be carried out in 2026 or 2027 due to its

benefits in gathering juvenile salmon passage and receiving return data. For PIT tagging to be possible in 2026, the associated costs must be fully underwritten by the end of January 2026. RW confirmed that funding for the smolt transport kit and some proportional allocated staff time is already secured.

Action: RW to put together a concise project proposal including funding and other requirements to be circulated to Board and proprietors as soon as possible.

RW stressed that a strong team will be required and EH reassured that help will be found and JB suggested that he may be able to assist.

Smolts appear to struggle to get out of Loch Beannacharan. RW is to explore 'Whoosh' solutions to aid smolts down the fish pass and speak to various stakeholders regarding funding and experience.

5. 2025 Catch Returns & Season Dates

HH has been collating rod catch data for 2025. Not all data had been received by the date of the Board meeting. As of 9th December 2025, the data received shows 524 salmon had been caught and 151 sea trout. Return rate is yet to be determined and will be known when all data is received.

The fish season dates were discussed. A proprietor had contacted the Board regarding the season dates due to low fish numbers. The Board is unable to change season dates but could lobby for change. The Board thought that one poor season would not be enough to support season changes.

Action: HH to respond to proprietor on behalf of the Board.

Action: HH to collect missing catch and release numbers from proprietors.

6. SSE

AC confirmed that the Board had a liaison meeting with SSE in early November 2025 and that it went well.

CM says the Board must remain to keep pressure on SSE to inform the Board of any outages to allow proprietors at the earliest possible opportunity. Also that fish counts need to be given and shared quicker.

The Black Bridge planning application is expected in June and the Board will need to come up with a response which is to be discussed in the March 2026 Board meeting. RW has had correspondence regarding Black Bridge.

Action: RW to circulate response to Black Bridge to the Board.

Dam fish lift timing were discussed. LBFS are in favour of an earlier first fish lift and a later last fish lift during the summer months. It was agreed that this would not be a problem as long as they were still in daylight hours. It was suggested that a 6am, midday and 8pm lift

would be suitable. RW informed the Board that SEPA would need involvement and it could be to late for the 2026 season to try this. Paul Jarman of the LBFS is to write to the Board regarding fish lift timings.

Action: RW to speak with SSE and SEPA to stress that proprietors have been requesting a change to the fish lift timings.

7. 2026 Budget and Funding Options

HH provided the forecast for the end of 2025 which shows a better result than what had been budgeted for.

Action: HH to circulate forecast document to Board following the meeting.

2026 budget currently shows a deficit of £16,418 but it is thought that this can be significantly be reduced through additional funding. 2026 budget is not yet finalised.

Action: HH to email Board members separately regarding staff pay increases.

RW has been applying for various funding and is keeping track of everything that has been and that can be applied for.

8. Operational Matters

8.1 Staffing

Staffing was discussed. It is hoped that the seasonal bailiff will return for the 2026 season. The Board will continue to liaise with the LBFS to improve and strengthen staff relations and expectations.

8.2 Office Premises

LBFS have served notice for the Board to vacate the office premises by the end of April 2026. Discussion was had around why this is the case and AC highlighted that the Board cannot rely on LBFS for free accommodation forever. Rental payments will have a negative impact on the 2026 budget.

Action: AC to go back to the LBFS to discuss timing of vacating the premises as well as storage possibilities.

RW viewing potential office premises in Muir of Ord on 10th December 2025.

9. NBFT

Neil Cameron (NC) and Brian Shaw (BS) joined the meeting to discuss the Ness and Beaully Fisheries Trust. In summary, the Board needs to decide if they are willing to let go of control of the Trust and allow for external Trustees to be appointed. If not, there is a risk that the Trust will need to fold. NC highlighted that the NBFT is the gap in the Moray firth with other Trusts being very active.

The benefit of the Trust is that it could attract green funding which is not available to the Board which would have an overall impact on river health and wider environmental factors. The River Ness Board support taking the Trust forward to allow external Trustees.

The option of separating into two Trusts was discussed, one for the Ness and one for Beaully. NC raised the risks and downsides to this, primarily being there would be the requirement for more Trustees, two development officers and higher costs. It was suggested that going bigger and incorporating the Cromarty would be more beneficial than going smaller.

The Board agreed that the Trust can find a development officer who would be appointed for two years, who would be responsible for stakeholder engagement and developing the Trust into a viable organisation.

If it is to proceed, there would need to be a strong relationship between the Board and Trust to ensure objectives align.

NC suggested it would be beneficial for the Trust, Ness Board and Beaully Board to share the same office space. This is something that will be discussed further down the line.

The legal costs of reconstituting the Trust or closing the Trust would be in the region of £5,000 - £10,000.

Action: RW and HH to follow up with NC and BS to give an update at the next Board meeting on how the search for a development officer is progressing.

10. AOCB

JB brought up his intention to stand down from the Board, but this will be at a later date due to the potential developments of the NBFT.

AC brought up an email received from Gordon Armstrong (LBFS ghillie) relating to a new alternative seal deterrent which could be used. This email relates to a currently successful running trial on the North Esk for a manually triggered acoustic seal deterrent device. There is a strong interest from the LBFS Head Ghillie to trial the device on the Lower Beaully. RW already aware of this and included information on it in the biologist update.

Action: RW to contact seal deterrent to offer the Beaully as a test site.

RW mentioned that Trees for Life have a paint for trees for if anyone is concerned about potential beaver damage. This paint will limit beaver impact.

Action: RW is to send out an updated, version 2, of the biologist report with a link which is missing from the original. This will also be available on the website.

11. Date of Next Meeting

Next Board meeting will be held on the 4th March 2026 at 10am at Bidwells, Inverness and on Microsoft Teams.