

MINUTES of THE MEETING of THE RIVER DEVERON DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD
being a Meeting open to the public in terms of the Aquaculture & Fisheries (Scotland) Act 2013
held at THE CASTLE HOTEL, HUNTLY on Thursday 6th July 2017 at 12 noon.
This meeting was held in conjunction with that of the TRUSTEES of THE DEVERON, BOGIE & ISLA RIVERS
CHARITABLE TRUST. The minutes cover both organisations.

At the outset the Chairman explained that in terms of the 2013 Act, all Meetings require to be open to the public. An invitation to the public was published on the Board's website along with a copy of the proposed Agenda. Any member of the public who wished to attend was required to inform the Clerk.

Matthew Marsden (proprietor), **Andrew Tennant** (proprietor) and **Calvert McKibbin** attended as members of the public.

Present: **Malcolm Hay** (B & T), **A Gordon Morison** (B), **Rory Cooper** (B & T) (All Upper Proprietors), **Donald Galloway** (B) (Banff & Macduff Angling Association - Lower), **Frank Henderson** (B & T) (Turriff Angling Association & Turriff Community), **Richard Breakell** (B) (Salmon Anglers), **Jim Cruickshank** (T), **Neil Stephen** (Ghillies' Rep – DBI Trust) **Richie Miller** (B and representative of DBI Trust)
In attendance- **Mrs S D Paxton** (Clerk to Board and Administrator of DBI Trust);
Marcus Walters (DBI Trust)
{ **B = Board member; T = Trustee or representative**}

Chairman: Malcolm Hay

Apologies for Absence: Richard Marsden (B), Robert Shields (B&T), Mrs J Player (B), David Borthwick (B&T)

Welcome & co-option Mr Hay welcomed guests to the meeting. Mr Marsden's father is a Board Member but is often unable to attend meetings. It was agreed unanimously that if Matthew Marsden was now able to attend then he would be co-opted to the Board as a representative of the Lower proprietors.

Mr Hay expressed his sadness at the news of the passing of Orri Vigfusson, founder and Chairman of the North Atlantic Salmon Fund. His enormous efforts to rebuild threatened wild salmon stocks in the North Atlantic had brought him global recognition and well-earned honours from a large assembly of admirers.

Minutes of Meetings on 6th April 2017 A draft of the Minutes of the Meetings had been sent to all Members of the Board and Trust. Mr Hay drew attention to the continued sterling efforts by DBI Trust and volunteers with their work in controlling hogweed. However some plants had been spotted near the Bogie on the railway embankment below Leith Hall and again near Gartly school – the Chairman requested that these areas be looked at. He stressed that everyone must keep their eyes open for sightings and report when necessary. When flowering, the best course of action is to cut off heads and burn.

It was reported that Mr Walters and Mr M Marsden had met with a member of the Banff Community Council to discuss the lights on Banff Bridge. It had been agreed that these would be turned off between April and October.

The minutes were then unanimously approved by those who had attended. The minutes have been published on the Board/Trust's website (www.deveron.org) and signed by the Chairman.

Aquaculture and Fisheries (Scotland) Act 2013

Mr Hay reported that there were no changes noted to Board Members Financial Interests since 6th April 2017 as applicable to the Board. No complaints against the Board had been received by the Clerk since the last meeting.

Report by Mr Miller on DBI Trust work

Mr Miller and Mr Walters had prepared a written report on the work of the Trust since the last Board Meeting and this was handed out (available on request). Both members went over the salient points:

- Smolt Trapping - a graph was handed out to show results from 2014 – 2017. A request was made for a comparison with rod catch to see if there is a relationship between adult catch and smolt run 2 to 3 years later.
- Smolt Tracking Project – the results were discussed. They showed a high proportion of loss on the river due to predation, probably mainly from birds. Members requested that when a bird licence application is made, evidence should be submitted to show this loss, along with more rigorous bird surveys/counting over the whole catchment.
- Deveron Trout Festival – had been very successful. Mr Hay suggested that we should publicise trout fishing (including daily tickets) as there was a clear opportunity for proprietors to develop this major and under used asset. There was a discussion on the rate for daily tickets and whether or not these should be increased.
- Mr Breakell asked about the use of hatcheries as a means of increasing fish stocks. Mr Hay said that it was hard to justify hatcheries (other than in situations of total loss) in light of new scientific evidence which appeared to indicate that hatchery stock might have a negative impact on the genetic integrity of our wild salmon populations should they reach maturity and return to the river to breed.

Update on Financial Matters

Mrs Paxton circulated draft statutory accounts for both The Board and the Trust for the year ended 31 March 2017. A couple of text changes were requested, and subject to that both sets of accounts were unanimously approved. Mrs Paxton was asked to arrange for the accounts to be signed.

A draft budget was circulated for the Board. Mr Hay had spoken to the Assistant Assessor regarding the setting of the new rateable values – there was an average increase of 17% (versus an actual rate of inflation over the period examined of 20%).

Proprietors have a period of 6 months to appeal but there may not be a conclusion for quite a while afterwards. Catch returns were the main yard stick along with rents and some assessment of perceived fishing effort.

There was a general discussion on the levy rate in view of the budget figures. The Board unanimously approved a rate of 42p in the £, a reduction of 17% on the previous rate of 0.49p and consistent with the increase in rateable values imposed by the Assessor. Mrs Paxton was asked to issue the notices to Proprietors.

The budget for the Trust was also circulated. Mrs Paxton again expressed concern at the possibility in the future of having to register for VAT but is monitoring the situation closely.

The valuation of the Improvement Fund stood at £129,305.

Quarterly accounts to 30 June for both Board and Trust will be issued to all Members shortly.

Update on Wild Fisheries Reform

Mr Hay intimated that there was nothing of significance to report.

Letter from Andrew Tennant

Following on from the Smolt Tracking Project, Mr Tennant was concerned about the smolt survival rates as they went downstream and felt that efforts should be made to increase this in order to increase the numbers of adult fish returning to the river. He suggested uplifting smolts from upstream areas and moving them to closer to the sea.

Mr Hay reported that he and Mr Miller had looked at the work done on the Conon where smolts were regularly transported to avoid hydro-electricity dams. However the distance over which the smolts were transported was relatively small.

In addition, recent research had shown that the smolting characteristics develop as the fish travel downstream and learn the route to follow when they return – there was a distinct likelihood that this imprinting might be disrupted if smolts were artificially moved long distances and released downstream, meaning that future spawning by returning adults might be seriously impaired.

The Conon biologist had also said that he would not dream of interfering with the smolt runs in this way if there were no hydro dams on the river.

It was felt that the main issue affecting the success of the smolt runs was predation. Smolt shepherding was discussed, and in particular targeting certain big pools with bird scaring strategies where there is known to be high mortality and high concentrations of predators.

Mr Miller and Mr Walters were asked to investigate to see if any rivers other than the Conon carry out transportation of smolts, and if any such activity was carried out for any reason other than avoiding hydro dams.

Mr Stephen suggested that a future tracking project might seek to trap and tag smolts at different staging points throughout the migration route to help identify 'hot' spots. Mr Walters undertook to speak to Matt Newton at Glasgow University to ask if another project was undertaken, what procedure they would advise.

Health & Safety

Mr Morison asked Mr Miller about the completion of risk assessments on activities. Mr Miller said that Greens of Haddington had carried out a review of operations while preparing our new handbook. We now have standard risk assessment forms to complete as required.

AOCB – Change to Angling Code

Mr Tennant asked the Board to consider an amendment to the Angling Code to further restrict the retention of fish in the period June to October to one salmon or grilse per rod per day, with a maximum of ONE per rod per week (a change from the current two per week). All present were in favour of making the change from the start of the next season.

Mr McKibbin further suggested that day rods be required to return all fish. This was unanimously accepted.

There was a discussion on encouragement of use of less damaging lures in the spring when all salmon were required to be returned. It was agreed that an appropriate amendment be made to the wording in the Code covering this period.

- AOCB – New Banff Bridge** Mr Morison asked if there was any information on the proposed new road bridge at Banff as outline planning permission appeared to have been granted. As of the date of the meeting, neither the Board nor Trust had seen any information on this.
- AOCB – Gravel on the River** Mr Cruickshank commented on the movement of gravel throughout the river. It was suggested that a drone might be used to identify the worst areas on the river and then consider removal. It was pointed out that significant movement of gravel occurs once the river has risen above 12 feet.
- AOCB – Retiral of Trust Administrator and Board Clerk** Mrs Paxton had already notified Mr Hay and Mr Shields but she now informed Members of her intention to retire with effect from 30 April 2018 at the latest. She hoped that the appointment of a successor could take place early in 2018 and if so, then she would step down at that point. She has assisted with the Trust for 6 years and the Board for 2, and now wishes to retire fully from business involvements.
- The Chairman expressed the thanks and appreciation of the Board and Trust for the highly valued role which Mrs Paxton had played over a challenging period for fisheries management in the face of Wild Fisheries Reform.
- AOCB – Next meeting:** The next Board/Trust meeting will be held on Thursday 14th September 2017, at The Castle Hotel at 3.30pm, followed by the Annual Proprietors Meeting/AGM at 5pm. Dr Alan Wells, CEO of FMS will be the Speaker.
- Meeting closed at 2.30pm** Mr Hay thanked everyone for attending.