

**MINUTES of THE COMBINED ANNUAL MEETING of QUALIFIED PROPRIETORS of
THE RIVER DEVERON DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY and ANNUAL PUBLIC OPEN MEETING
held at CASTLE HOTEL, HUNTLY on Thursday, 14th SEPTEMBER 2017 at 5pm**

- Present:** **Mrs M Burnett-Stuart** (Ardmeallie, Boat of Turtory), **R Cooper** (Mains of Auchingoul), **J Cruickshank** (Carnousie, Ardmiddle, Inverkeithny Glebe, Inverkeithny, Upper Netherdale, Lower Netherdale), **M Hay** (Edinglassie) also as mandatory for C R & M R Marsden (Duff House), Glennie 2011 Settlement (Tillydown), **A G Morison** (Mountblairy and Bognie), **R Shields** (Avochie) also as mandatory for J Shields (Woodside & Inverisla), **C Innes** (Euchrie & Kinnairdy), **A D Tennant** (Forglen) also as mandatory for A Allwood (Muiresk), **J Ingleby** (Cairnborrow & Blairmore), **F Henderson** (co-optee represents salmon anglers), **R Breakell** (co-optee represents salmon anglers), **D Galloway** as mandatory for Banff & Macduff Angling Association (River Deveron), **Mrs J Player** as mandatory for J Player (Upper Inverichnie), **J Begg** as mandatory for Mr & Mrs D A Sharp (Corniehaugh),
Also in attendance: **Mrs S Paxton** (Clerk to the Board); **R Miller** (River Director); **eight members of the public including members of the Deveron, Bogie and Isla Rivers Charitable Trust, Ghillies, Estate Managers and Anglers, FMS.**
- Apologies for Absence:** **A Allwood** (Muiresk), **A Cheyne** (Mains of Mayen and Mayen & Garronhaugh), **Mrs D A Stancioff** (Dunlugas), **C R Marsden and M R Marsden** (Duff House); **Glennie 2011 Settlement (Tillydown)** (per R Foster); **Mr & Mrs D A Sharp** (Corniehaugh); **A Higgins** (Castle Fishings); **J D Player** (Lower Inverichnie); **Messers F M Stewart & Sons** (Gibston); **J Shields** (Woodside & Inverisla); **Shabondy Corpn** (Beldorney); **Mr & Mrs A Russell** (Drachlaw), **D Borthwick** (co-optee represents salmon anglers); **Huntly Fishings Committee.**
- Chairman:** Mr Malcolm Hay welcomed Proprietors, Mandatories, Ghillies, Members of the Deveron, Bogie and Isla Rivers Charitable Trust, guest speaker (Dr Alan Wells, CEO of Fisheries Management Scotland) and other members of the public.
- Minutes of last Annual Meeting:** Having circulated the minutes in advance for the last meeting held on 15th September 2016, it was proposed that they be taken as read and were unanimously approved.
- New Board Member** Mr Hay announced that The Board had appointed another member to represent the Lower Proprietors – Matthew Marsden (Duff House). He asked for formal approval from the Proprietors present – all in favour.
- Annual Report & Accounts:** Mr Hay presented the accounts to the meeting. An abbreviated version of the Board's Accounts are included in the Annual Report for the Board and Trust which had been circulated in advance to all proprietors and interested parties. Mr Hay asked if there were any questions. Mr Tennant asked for clarification on certain items – gifted asset, transfers regarding the Smolt Project and the Improvement Fund – which Mr Hay explained. No other questions were raised and so the Accounts and Report were adopted.
- Future of the Board/Trust:** Mr Hay invited Richie Miller, River Director, to give his report on the work of the Trust. As the main activities are highlighted in The Annual Report, Mr Miller gave only a short presentation on certain activities.
- Question & Answer Session:** The Chairman now welcomed questions and observations.
Mr Meikle (tenant on a lower beat) raised concern over the lack of fish and asked what action was being taken. Mr Hay advised that the Trust/Board are

doing everything possible to ensure the in-river habitat achieves the highest success rate in the recruitment of juvenile fish.

Mr Meikle added that predation was also a problem. Mr Hay agreed and advised that the Board/Trust are pursuing SNH for a higher bird licence quota as well as an explanation of the reasoning behind the existing licence figures. He suggested anglers write to their MSP or Roseanna Cunningham, the Scottish Environment Minister, to express their concern.

Mr Innes suggested we focus on watching over smolt runs. Mr Hay advised this was already under consideration with a view to scaring birds in identifiable predation black spots. There was a suggestion of another smolt project to see if such shepherding techniques would prove successful.

Mr Tennant believed the river was at crisis point and that fishermen would stop coming, which in turn would have economic repercussions. Mr Hay replied that the Board were in the process of commissioning an economic impact assessment to address precisely that point, and which would hopefully also illustrate the impact of predation on the fishery and the need for more action.

Mr Tennant suggested moving smolts in tanks closer to the mouth of the river, as done on the River Conon. Mr Hay advised that this had already been examined and that the scientific advice suggested that this would likely do more harm than good. Smolts are constantly developing while on the move downstream, and artificial relocation by man would likely shorten the growth period and probably cause significant mortality, likely higher than existing natural predation. The practice was carried out on only a couple of rivers in response to the extreme and specific threat presented by Hydro installations.

Mr Tennant asked about reopening the hatchery. Mr Hay said that this was constantly under review but, again, the current consensus among scientific opinion was that hatcheries were only appropriate in a disaster scenario. Survival rates of hatchery fish had been shown to be extremely poor to non-existent, and, even if successful, returning adults would pose a threat to the genetic integrity of the existing wild population.

Mr Tennant suggested the Board invest in a fish counter. Mr Hay confirmed that the Board was trialling sonar and camera based technologies, but that neither had proved wholly effective in the Deveron environment. Because these machines were hugely expensive, the Board was disinclined to invest until able to find a system that worked. However, the urgent need for such a machine was acknowledged and Mr Miller confirmed that more investigatory work will be carried on next year.

Mr Hay said that the Board plans to insert an extra column in the catch return to allow information to be collated on 'let days' or 'rod weeks' in order to try and assess fishing effort more accurately.

- Presentation:** An informative talk was given by Dr Alan Wells, CEO of Fisheries Management Scotland, followed by a question and answer session.
- Thanks:** Mr Hay recorded his thanks to Dr Wells for a very informative talk.
- Meeting closed:** At 7pm, followed by refreshments.