

MINUTES OF TRUSTEES' MEETING

WESTER ROSS FISHERIES TRUST OFFICES		PRESENT:	
DATE:	29 May 2014	David Barclay (DB) Chair	Mark Williams (MW)
OPENED AT:	11.00	Angus Davidson (AD)	Bob Kindness (BK)
CLOSED AT:	15.15	Ewen Ballantyne (EB)	
IN ATTENDANCE:		APOLOGIES:	
Bill Whyte (BW)	Peter Cunningham (PC)	Richard Greene (RG)	Nigel Pearson (NP)
Peter Jarosz (PJ)		Henry Dalgety (HD)	Melanie Smith (MS)
		Matthew Curran (MC)	

1. **MATTERS ARISING**

There were no matters arising from the 6th March 2014 minutes – which were adopted as an accurate record and were proposed by AD seconded by EB.

2. **Meetings (DB) and correspondence**

DB suggested that this should be a regular Agenda item in order to inform Trustees of background activities progressed by himself and PJ which did not rate a separate Agenda discussion.

2.i Within the past two weeks DB had a meeting with Jenny Scobie and Don Staniford in Ullapool. They first discussed common ground and issues. It became obvious during the meeting that JS believed that WRFT had a far wider remit than it actually does have. DB précised the Trust's remit as "existing to support wild fish". Whilst common ground and issues exist for both WRFT and Protect Wild Scotland, the manner in which PWS generally works is inappropriate for WRFT. The meeting became an exercise in stating the obvious common ground and listing the many differences in the ways each entity operates; however DB does think there is a place for the more political approach adopted by PWS, and which OSCAR rules would prevent us employing.

2.ii The previous day (Wednesday 28th May 2014) the WRASFB annual proprietors' and annual public meetings had taken place. Both these meetings are now a legal requirement (Aquaculture and Fisheries Act (2013)) and were conducted according to the procedure outlined in the Act.

2.iii A planning application has been submitted by the Scottish Salmon Company (SSC) under S42 of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 for their Fish Farm at Sgeir Dughall, Loch Torridon (reference 14/01868/S42). This application seeks permanent consent for the fish farm at Sgeir Dughall (i.e. without a ten-year term and without conditions relating to wild fish). Within this submission there is reference to the close working relationship SSC claims to have with WRFT. The trustees felt that the submission greatly overstated the degree of contact that existed, notwithstanding that one of their employees, Henry Dalgety, currently acts as a Trustee.

Additionally it is stated, in the submission by SSC, that WRFT has had "no concerns" about the operation at Sgeir Dughall. Minutes of the WRFT meeting in December 2013 clearly record deep concerns WRFT had then and had been having as far back as August 2013. In the Trust's view this is a deliberately misleading statement.

A further difficulty arose, in the view of the Board, because HD had taken part in meetings with the Board, representing his employers. The Board felt that this compromised his position and affected their willingness to hold confidential discussions with the Trust.

Back in March, HD had offered to resign if this would assist the "board/trust" relationship. At the time trustees unanimously agreed not to accept his offer of resignation that appeared to be stimulated solely by an 'in principle' objection to fish farming per se. The situation has changed and the concern of the Board that HD might act as a 'mole' is a realistic issue, even if HD recuses himself from relevant discussions. It would be unfortunate if this new concern adversely affected communication in the way the Board has conveyed to the Trust.

The Trustees agreed to ask HD if his earlier offer still stood, and if so would he be prepared to resign. If so, the matter would be resolved, but if not this procedure would give the Trustees a further opportunity to debate the issue at the August meeting.

DB will write to HD.

3. **BOARD UPDATE**

BW gave a detailed update of the work the board had been involved in over the past financial year:

- A planning application at Loch Kanaird for site relocation and modification was granted a time limited consent due to concerns from both the Board and the Highland Council.

decided that all 3 sites are required to produce a full EIA and consultation prior to any decision being made – the Board had requested this very action in its original response.

- The fish farm site at Corry, Loch Broom, was determined by a Scottish Government Audit Process and was granted full permanent planning permission. The Board is not a consultee for these Audit Processes, and therefore was not consulted on this audit.
- There have been four hydro schemes during the past year (Letterewe, Dundonnell, Langwell and Badachro) and the board has been consulted on these for as well as a number of further hydro schemes that are, as yet, not in the planning process.

For the current financial year, the Board, in partnership with the Trust, will continue to improve its database on wild fish, fisheries and aquaculture operations within the board area in order to meet its statutory remit. To that end the Board has budgeted four quarterly amounts of £4K for the work it requires the Trust to fulfil. Providing funds permit, a further sum of circa £6K may be allocated to additional work that the Board could ask the Trust to undertake on its behalf.

4. FINANCE REPORTS

4.i Cash Projections.

On 25th May 2014 the end of April cash projections had been emailed to trustees so that they had an opportunity to read through them and bring any queries to the meeting.

No queries were raised.

4.ii Management Reports

VM presented simplified financial reports to the meeting.

4.iii 2014 Budget

A draft budget had been emailed out to trustees on 25th May 2014. Whilst the draft budget was still not 100% complete, it was already demonstrating that some of the decisions made late in the last financial year (such as the re-negotiation of the status of the second biologist and the need for economy of the use of paid assistants for PC's field work) were stabilizing the trust's income/expenditure position. The new mini-reports were providing a more readily appreciated feel for the cash flow. It was agreed that continual monitoring of the financial position was crucial as was the need to find and secure new sources of income for the trust.

5. CURRENT WRFT FUNDING ISSUES

5.i RAFTS

Sweep-netting at the three locations that have traditionally been financed by RAFTS will continue this year, though it is uncertain just how much RAFTS will fund it. Additionally the Board may request sweep-netting in other areas close to aquaculture sites that have ten year terms and conditions relating to impact on wild fish.

5.ii WRASFB

Already covered above.

BW asked could any of the Board's funding be used as "matched funding" for projects that additional funding could be sought for?

5.iii UHI

Already covered above

5.iv SFT

There will be some work this year from SFT (see PC's report) and, where possible, PC could do some of this work providing it does not take up time that is required to complete the WRFT work schedule. Any other work for SFT could be fulfilled by MC.

5.v Southern Proprietors

Fully covered in the previous meeting.

6. BIOLOGIST' REPORTS

5.i PC's report (attached below)

PC's report had been circulated on 23rd May 2014 to trustees. PC offered a précis of the contents of his report to the meeting.

- Work on Skye for the SFT will begin with a field survey near Broadford.
- PC and SFT believe that the collection of sea trout and sea lice data in the Loch Slappin

presence for over four years and with the nearest farm 40 kilometres away. It is now the subject of a planning application for four large fish farms by Hjatland. With no current data on sea trout and sea lice any response to the planning applications is purely anecdotal.

- The Little Gruinard invertebrate study by French student Geoffrey Billier is now completed after three months of investigation. GB has produced a report that contains a wealth of data and information that can be used for future reference and comparison.

7. PLANNING AHEAD

7.i Wild Fisheries Review

Even after the local area meeting that took place last Tuesday it is not possible to predict the outcome of the review. It is, therefore, impossible to forecast what regional bodies for the protection of wild fish may be in situ post the review and the Scottish Government's resultant decision.

7.ii Direction of the Trust

The core aim of the trust is to do work that is focussed on salmonids/wild fish. Additionally, the trust needs to be more community orientated.

7.iii 5-year: Aims and plan

The trust needs to develop a 5-year plan defining its aims over that same period and beyond. This in itself is a time consuming task and DB asked if there could be funding available for this project.

7.iv Trustees

The trust needs to attract a number of additional trustees.

8. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

NEXT MEETINGS	DATE	LOCATION	TIME
Trustees' meeting	14/08/2014	WRFT Office	11.00
Trustees' meeting	23/10/2014	WRFT Office	11.00
Trustees' meeting	16/12/2014	WRFT Office	11.00

WRFT Trustee Meeting 29th May 2014
Preliminary WRFT Biologists Report (as of 23rd May)

1. Rod catches

Preliminary catch figures released by Marine Scotland for 2013 indicate lower catches than in 2012 for both salmon and sea trout for nearly all the larger river systems in the Wester Ross area. For Scotland as a whole, the total catch of sea trout is likely to be the lowest in the 61 year time-series record.

Summary of Scottish Government preliminary catch salmon and sea trout figures for 2013 for WRFT & Skye FT areas. Note that these figures are incomplete for some areas (see notes below table).

Fishery area	salmon			grilse			wild salmon and grilse			escaped farm salmon	sea trout			notes (see below)
	released	retained	total	released	retained	total	released	retained	total		released	retained	total	
Kanaird	2	0	2	12	1	13	14	1	15		2	0	2	
Ullapool	2	0	2	0	0	0	2	0	2		4	5	9	
Little Loch Broom	15	1	16	11	1	12	26	2	28		2	0	2	
Gruinard	37	2	39	82	1	83	119	3	122		5	0	5	1
Ewe	79	3	82	104	22	126	183	25	208	3	18	0	18	
Small Isles	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0		16	24	40	
Badachro	36		36	0		0	36	0	36		1		1	2
Sligachan	21	0	21	8	4	12	29	4	33		51	12	63	
Snizort	121	12	133	26	2	28	147	14	161		73	4	77	
Balgay	4	0	4	4	3	7	8	3	11		7	1	8	3
Applecross	5		5	4		4	9	0	9		6		6	
Carron	81	11	92	37	4	41	118	15	133		50	1	51	
Loch Long	40	13	53	8	3	11	48	16	64		30	15	45	4
Croë	0	1	1	2	0	2	2	1	3		0	0	0	
Glenelg	2		2	0		0	2	0	2		7		7	
Arnisdale	5	0	5	9	1	10	14	1	15	1	8	5	13	

notes:

1. 'Gruinard' includes both the big Gruinard River and the Little Gruinard River. One of the catch returns is not included in the figures above; the total rod catch for the Gruinard in 2013 has been agreed as 124 salmon and grilse and 6 sea trout; and for the Little Gruinard, 75 salmon. For some of the other fishery areas (e.g. Ullapool) figures are also assumed to be incomplete.

2. Badachro includes the River Kerry. Figures here possibly highlight the difficulty of separating grilse from salmon in catch records as it seems rather unlikely that all the fish were salmon and grilse were completely absent from rod catches.

3. Catches for the Torridon River are not included. The official return records 108 salmon and grilse, 124 sea trout (for 196.8kg) and 1117 finnock. With an average size of over 3lb, the reported sea trout catch has raised a few eyebrows.

The first rod caught salmon within the WRFT of the 2014 season area was a fine fish caught and released by keeper Arran Matheson in the River Kanaird on 14th April. Several salmon were caught in the River Ewe so far in May, and others were seen in the Little Gruinard . . .

2. Fish survey reports and juvenile fish surveys

A report was completed for Skye Fisheries Trust with the results of surveys carried out on Skye in 2013 and sent to various people involved with Skye for comment. Results from limited e-fish surveys within the WRFT area in 2013 will now be included within a report following the 2014 field season, plans for which include surveys of all the major river systems within the WRASFB area in addition to surveys of rivers within the southern part of the WRFT area which were not surveyed in 2013. Surveys will begin in early July in the south of the WRFT area.

3. Sea trout sampling

Sweep netting will begin in June with sampling to be arranged at Kanaird, Loch Ewe, Flowerdale and Balmacara or another site within the Loch Duich – Aish area. Funding is now anticipated from the Scottish Government as part of the RAFTS MIAP programme for the three northerly sites, and from other sources for the southern site. WRASFB may contribute to the costs of additional sweep netting and to the costs of operating the Dundonnell fyke net as in 2013.

On 30th April sample of overwintered finnock and a sea trout kelt taken from the River Ewe using rod and line was examined. These fish, heading for the sea, were all in relatively good condition. Thank you to Hugh Whittle for catching the fish.

There is a need to collect more information about sea trout within the area. Given poor catches around Scotland much could be learned from a nationwide standardised sampling programme. Other fishery trusts have expressed support for the development of a Scottish sea trout project. At a RAFTS collaborative projects discussion meeting on 9th June it may be possible to make further progress.

See below for further comments about sea trout sampling around Skye.

4. Mink monitoring project [SMI programme; funding agreement with SNH via RAFTS]

Two mink were caught within the WRFT area in early April; one by the Broom, the other near Aultbea where another mink was also seen. Since then there have been few reports; however it is likely that mink are present in several areas. I attended a meeting at Conon Bridge on 1st May to review SMI progress. There is a need to maintain interest and monitoring and trapping effort. As mink are a principle threat to the success of breeding terns around the West of Scotland and the availability of sandeels which also affects sea trout also of importance I propose to package already scheduled sweep netting and on-going SMI project support work into a 'Wester Ross Wild Tern Week' (23rd to 26th June). In addition to these activities, an evening talk or two and field excursion (or two) to view nesting terns are being arranged with support from mink project officer, Ann-Marie McMaster. The aim is to maintain interest and increase awareness of both issues.

Gannets and terns have been seen feeding around Loch Gairloch in recent days; I videoed sandeels when snorkelling in Gruinard Bay in mid May. Spring 2014 has been warmer than in 2013 and I'm optimistic that by late June we'll record sea trout in good condition.

5. Work in Skye [funded by the Skye Fisheries Trust]

Skye FT is currently going through a period of changes. A new part-time biologist, Isabel Moore, has been recruited to help progress work and Ian Lindsay is now helping with running the Trust. I plan to help Skye FT with a contract for a field survey near Broadford. One of the most pressing concerns for Skye (which indirectly, may also affect wild fish within the Wester Ross area) is plans by Hjatland for 4 large (2,000+ tonne) new farms around the island. I've recommended that as much effort as possible be put into collecting sea trout and sea lice data over the next few months especially in the Loch Slappin area prior to resumption of salmon farming within that area. Since 2010, the nearest active salmon farms have been 40km away; and there is a rare opportunity to learn about the performance of sea trout in an area away from salmon farms prior to proposed developments. This is work that should be of value to wild fisheries interests elsewhere in the West of Scotland.

6. Tournai trap project [part-supported by Marine Harvest] and smolt runs

In the downstream trap at Tournai, Ben Rushbrooke recorded modest numbers of salmon and sea trout smolts (both less than 100) and also two salmon kelts. Thanks to Mark Williams for recording smolt runs at Sguod over several days in early May; here sea trout out-numbered salmon (figures will be available at the meeting). Water levels rose in the middle of May following a relatively dry period.

7. Little Gruinard invertebrate study [supported by Eilean Darach Estate and to fulfil grant agreement with SNH]

Geoffrey Billiet has produced a very interesting draft report following a three month investigation of aquatic invertebrates within the Little Gruinard. His report describes invertebrate biodiversity and relative abundance in the river; considers how this relates to biological production; presents a study of drifting invertebrates over sampling 24hour periods; and describes the food found within juvenile salmon sampled in the early morning and in the evening (to compare feeding during the day and during the night). The data he has collected is extensive and can be used for future reference and comparison. Geoffrey has done an excellent job and heads off on the 28th May; later in the summer he'll be based at Forth Fisheries Trust in Edinburgh. Thank you to Brian and Carol Fraser, Stuart Allison and Eilean Darach estate for providing accommodation and support.

8. Other things

- **Bruachaig.** 8,000 salmon fry from Bob Kindness were stocked out on 1st May.

- **Slattadale Burn:** school visit by pupils from George Watson's College on 19th May. Pupils worked hard to help clear back small non-native conifers from the sides of the burn; FC forest officer Chris MacDonald of the Forestry Commission helped and spoke about the forest and its wildlife.
- **Middlesex University visit with Dr Steve Kett** (13th May). Many thanks to Ben Rushbrooke at Tournai for taking time out from the garden nursery to help with a visit of 17 students to the Tournai trap; during the afternoon we sampled invertebrates in Flowerdale burn.
- **Scottish MPA programme.** SNH have published their final advice for the Scottish Government which includes proposals for a Wester Ross MPA and a Loch Duich – Aish MPA.
- **Salmon farm visit.** On 2nd May I visited the MH Loch Duich and Ardintoul farm. Thank you to Dougie Hunter for arranging this visit and his time.
- **Contract work:** I'm finalising a report following habitat survey of two streams in relating to HP project development. Scottish Water has also approached the Trust for quotes for survey work.
- **Japanese Knotweed.** On 10th April, Mark Lorimer hosted a meeting attended by Rob Dewar of NTS and representatives of almost all neighbouring estates. Our aim is to better co-ordinate work to eradicate JK from the catchment area.
- **Giant hogweed.** I launched an attack and have successfully killed to the best of my knowledge a Giant hogweed plant growing by the side of the A832 in Glen Docherty on 2nd May. Vice county plant recorder, Duncan Donald said that it is one of very few records for Wester Ross.
- **Annual Review.** I'm behind with this due largely to unforeseen work of higher priority (£). I hope to complete a draft by mid-June.

Peter Cunningham, 23rd May 2014