

MINUTES OF WRFT TRUSTEES' MEETING

Via Teams and in Harbour Centre	PRESENT: Mark Williams (MW) Duncan Burd (DB). Alasdair Macdonald (AM)	Steve Kett (SK) Michael Aitchison (MA) Andrew D Barclay (AB)
DATE: 10 May 2022		
OPENED AT: 13.30 CLOSED AT: 15.30	IN ATTENDANCE: Peter Cunningham (PC) Colin Simpson (CS)	Peter Jarosz (PJ) Emma Watson (EW)

Attendees present both online and at the office introduced themselves and their role within WRFT.

1. Matters arising from minutes of the meeting held on 17th December 2021.

There were no matters arising.

2. Approval of the minutes

PJ asked for a proposer and a seconder of the minutes of the 17th December Meeting. MA proposed and DB seconded - the minutes were approved.

3. Update on Various Happenings

A decision regarding the 2 fish farms in Loch Torridon has still not been made. WRFT is at an impasse as Highland Council (HC) have not fulfilled their remit nor agreed an EMP. Therefore Mowi and the Scottish Salmon Company (SSC) are stocking their farms without the approval of an adequate EMP; this is strictly against the conditions of the planning application. WRFT Board have instructed PJ to write to Mark Harvey and his immediate manager Dafydd Jones of the HC, to press for a decision to be made by them. This will be informal in the first instance; in the absence of results by this approach, the next step is a legal letter to HC. Additionally, the Board has involved a QC who is an expert in Scottish Planning Law and is of the opinion that the EMPs that have been submitted by Mowi and SSC do not fulfil the conditions of their planning consent. Therefore, the Board will continue to pursue that these need to be far more robust.

WRFT were invited to provide a quote for monitoring in Loch Torridon for these fish farms but declined to do so, as this would be implicit approval of stocking without planning consent. The contract has therefore gone to an outside firm called APEM. The consensus of the Board was that Marine Scotland can take the lead in approval of the license with input from the Board, under the condition that when APEM do this work a) someone from WRFT or Marine Scotland Science should be present for monitoring to ensure its efficiency and b) WRFT should receive the data as and when it is produced immediately after monitoring. These conditions of consent will be communicated to Marine Scotland.

There was a meeting with Mowi shortly after the December meeting regarding the semi-contained units for broodstock they had proposed to install in Loch Ewe and the loch at Inverpolly. Mowi supplied a great deal of information about the unit, and the location at Loch Ewe is intended to be far enough away from other fish farms so as to minimise risk of sea lice and disease transmission. They have proposed four units each with a carrying capacity of 250 tonnes. WRFT has not yet seen a scoping application to HC as the plans have not yet moved past intention stage.

Over the last month rumours have circulated that Wester Ross Fisheries (WRF) Ltd was on the market. A number of aquaculture companies were mentioned as potential buyers, with Mowi as the lead interested party. SM of Mowi confirmed to PJ that he is not involved in those pre-negotiations and therefore could not comment, but said as negotiations move forward, he will let WRFT know before it hits the press.

In a consultation about sea lice regulation, SEPA proposed very small protected areas around river mouths, to include only new salmon farms and not initial existing salmon farms. This was deemed unsatisfactory by the Board, which has submitted a response that is available on the Board website.

4. Biologist's Report

PC provided summary of surveys carried out and some of the findings, including report on electrofishing from last year and the [Status of Salmon in Wester Ross Report](#). Salmon relatively healthy, but rivers in south of the region are very unhealthy with significantly less productivity (full details in the report).

Fish farms are posing a threat, with the worst case scenario being Mowi taking over WRF and changing methods of production from small hands on cages to high cost production, as they have not been successful with their sea lice control. It will be important to ensure we have enough data and information to support a campaign against it.

There has been one sweep net session on the 16th April, which yielded a small catch of 8 trout with low lice levels.

There have been reports of people catching sea trout in sea at Ullapool (near Rhue) and Loch Broom. There is a need to make contact with sea trout fishers to work out some sort of system to give people information and awareness of what they are catching.

PC has been taking water samples from Melvaig and South Erradale as per contract with Napier University for the West of Scotland Herring Hunt project. They will be analysing the samples for herring eDNA to demonstrate spawning. PC sampled fish larvae using plankton net from kayak by Melvaig to confirm nearby spawning of herring – those sampled were around 10mm and were confirmed by Marine Scotland Science to indeed be herring around 3 to 4 weeks old. In March and April PC ran, mostly in his own time and cost, an educational exhibition in Gairloch Museum on spring spawning herring, with outreach and activities with Fiona Mackenzie of Aberdeen Science Centre.

Grant applications have been submitted to NatureScot and the Scottish Salmonid Fund for creating riparian woodland enclosures around Loch Maree. The project was developed with much help and input from CS and additional work from PJ in his own time.

A survey was carried out with Colin Morrison of Angus Davidson Associates at the headwaters of Ullapool River in Glen Douchary. The aim was to assess sediment sources and opportunities for riparian habitat restoration; much evidence of bank collapse and sediment input was found. Colin M will follow up with a Drone survey; there is ongoing peatland restoration work in catchment area already.

5. Finance

Information about income for next year is sparse and not concrete. The draft cash projection contains information about finances that we are almost certainly sure of; however, supplementary or additional finance may be available e.g. grant funding not yet guaranteed.

Even within this limit we are still reasonably viable. Known expenses have been included in cash projections but other decisions have been tentatively made which will take up more income.

There is 62k that is not ringfenced for elsewhere, meaning that running throughout the year with the known expenses and known income we end up with 65,642k. Effectively, we will certainly break even on the year, but there are some additional expenses that are not included yet. This includes employing PC at 4 days a week. Once a concrete budget plan is agreed trustees will be informed, as funding may potentially come in from other projects.

6. 2022 Work Programme

There is a limit to what we know can be done this year due to finance, however anticipated work

includes:

- Sweep netting
- Adult salmon rod and line monitoring with funding from the Scottish government in September
- Operation of coastal fyke net - application to be put into Crown estate for a lease.
- Potential electrofishing, if this is deemed important
 - Donation coming from the Board, with no direction as to what it must be used for, could be used for smaller scale e-fishing programme in absence of NEPS grant this year. This will likely focus on sea trout rivers as salmon rivers were done last year.
- Applecross monitoring for fish farm on Skye
 - Due to the proximity of Mowi fish farm to west coast & likely impact on rivers and fish of W. Ross, one of conditions of the EMP was that monitoring should occur on Applecross River. Nothing was done last year during their first full year of production on Caol Mor. WRFT have had a tentative nod of approval from Mowi to begin monitoring, and a plan for finance has to be fleshed out to be put to Stephen Macintyre of Mowi with consent expected. This additional work is not included in budget plan.
 - Corresponding monitoring over on Skye by Kyle & Lochalsh Trust is 29k worth of monitoring for that farm. We will not be in that region, but could be near 50% of that. PC lower estimate would be about 6-8k to be conservative.
- Smaller works: Inverewe Garden – PC sea shore surveys to link in with underwater garden exhibition

We are keen to retain CS and EW for further work following their completion of the 12-week Working With Rivers Training Programme through NatureScot. This could include the following:

- CS has contributed a great deal of work to the applications for riparian tree enclosures; will continue working on the project if funding comes in.
- EW will assist PJ with administration going forward for 2 days per week.
- Providing assistance to Manta Ecology's one remaining worker for rhododendron removal at Kerrysdale: upcoming meeting with Eamon to arrange this.
- CS to continue mapping ponticum around Tournai, Aultbea, Laide, Second Coast (certain areas are particular problem as in people's garden; plant swap scheme would be useful) which could potentially be digitised with GIS
 - SK suggested a Maverick Drone could be a useful tool for carrying out Phase 1 habitat surveys to map the extent of invasive species – relatively cheap and easy to fly without training, and would be good to consider going forward
- Potential work on INNR removal at Dundonnell.
- There is scope to follow up with Forestry & Land Scotland re. ideas with INNR removal around Lael Forest. This could again tie in with Manta Ecology, who will be applying for more funding in August.

7. Conflict of Interest Book

Assembly of new Conflict of Interest Book: PJ will adapt template from FMS with WRFT logo so that all trustees answer the same questions, to be put round asap.

8. AOCB

CS and EW have completed the 12 week Working with Rivers Training Placement with WRFT funded by NatureScot. Both CS and EW had positive comments on the running and experiences of the

placement, which had a good mix and variety of planned work programmes with the element of self-lead learning. Additionally, the freedom to express to PC what trainees would like to pursue themselves was very useful in the co-ordination of activities. Work included invasive species surveying and removal, headwater survey at East Rhiddoroch, online seminars and courses, an invertebrate surveying course in Aviemore, meetings with various landowners, self-directed research into the structure and funding of fisheries bodies and the workings of government agencies. All agreed it is excellent for course to be leading onto more opportunities with Trust as planned. It would be a good idea for EW to go on electrofishing course as well to have an extra person on retainer to assist PC.

With agreement of the Trustees, PJ will write letter to Nigel Pearson on Trustee's behalf requesting refund of 560 from Skye Rivers Trust for costs regarding the ringfenced monies held by Skye and Lochalsh for the possible claim for HMRC regarding the issue of the company car.

We need to follow up with BEAR Scotland the reports of dumping of the old crash barriers into the river at Braemore Junction, as per point from last meeting.

9. Date of next meeting

To be arranged via Doodle Poll.