

## MINUTES OF WRFT TRUSTEES' MEETING

|                                   |  |   |
|-----------------------------------|--|---|
| Via Zoom and in Harbour Centre    | <b>PRESENT:</b><br>Steve Kett (SK)<br>Andrew D Barclay (AB)        | Alasdair Macdonald (AM)<br>James Close (JC) |
| DATE: 13 December 2022            | <b>IN ATTENDANCE:</b><br>Peter Cunningham (PC)<br>Emma Watson (EW) | Mary Gibson (MG)<br>Peter Jarosz (PJ)       |
| OPENED AT: 10:00 CLOSED AT: 11:45 | <b>APOLOGIES:</b><br>Mark Williams                                 | Michael Aitchison                           |

**1. Matters arising from minutes of the meeting held on 10<sup>th</sup> May 2022.**

There were no matters arising.

**2. Approval of the minutes**

The minutes of the previous meeting were approved.

**3. Update on Various Happenings**

AB has been in discussion with various riparian owners, community members, and organisations to find out what people believe the ideal role of the Trust should be and proposed some low level actions that would allow the Trust to better support the local community. The Trust could act as neutral backup support to help facilitate community activities by making our existing resources, such as the office space, equipment, and vast library of scientific data and information, available for use in citizen science projects. Training could also be provided in the use of this data and equipment. The Trustees agreed that these actions would be a good step forward in WRFT becoming more 'outward facing' and community involved, and the aims and objectives of the Trust could be rewritten to reflect this.

Both fish farm operators in Loch Torridon have been stocking all three farms in that area without agreement of EMP, in complete breach of the planning permission agreement. Highland Council (HC) have not acted upon this. The Board are arranging a date for a meeting in January with HC and Marine Scotland Science (MSS). PJ has also requested raw data from APEM, who carry out monitoring for the aquaculture companies, as PC has misgivings about the interpretation of data in their electrofishing report for this year.

The Board has objected strongly to the Section 42 directive to remove the condition of a 10 year term at the Ardmail site, and has requested that HC either i) refuse the application completely, ii) grant another 10 year term to Mowi, or iii) ensure that a very robust EMP should be in place.

A planning application for a broodstock development on land has been submitted by Marine Harvest at the Ardesie facility, but the Board has no remit to object to anything on land.

**4. Biologist's Report**

PC provided a summary of surveys carried out over the summer season and some of the findings. Not a lot of electrofishing was carried out – mainly at Dundonnell and Tournai to complement the bigger survey that was done in 2021.

A new seine net was used for the adult salmon netting project. Netting was most successful utilising a team of snorkellers, and salmon were successfully caught at Dundonnell and Gruinard. Not so many lice were found this year.

PC is still awaiting figures on rod catches from all the estates.

Three escaped farm salmon were caught in the sweep net at Kanaird, despite no escapes being reported from local farm.

PC organised a riparian woodland day at Torrison in collaboration with Beinn Eighe NNR and the Woodland Trust following the screening of Riverwoods at Torrison Hall to continue raising awareness of the importance of these habitats to wild fish. A tree planting session followed the meeting. Support is needed from some of the bigger estates for riparian woodland creation projects.

A coastal fyke net to catch sea trout was trialled successfully in Loch Ewe and will be deployed again next year. Most juvenile cod that were caught were found to have blackspot – PC has sent samples to lab in Aberdeen for analysis.

The Wester Ross MPA Discovery Day was held by WRFT at the Macphail Centre in Ullapool in October, bringing together over 40 people from the local community and coastal community groups, and featuring several interesting talks and presentations from leading marine scientists on the uniqueness and importance of the Wester Ross MPA.

## **5. Finance**

Cash projections have been circulated and understood by all.

Ronnie would like to meet regarding management reports of each project to give more detail of spending per individual project and commented that projections do look better than originally expected.

Other matters not yet included in the figures: we have not yet billed Mowi for their support of the Tournais trap; this should be another £3000 to come in. The Fisheries Management Plan contract will also bring in another £4000, and another £1000 for electrofishing.

If necessary, the Trust can afford to pay PC for 5 days a week instead of 4 next year – if he wants to! Ronnie is also happy to carry on with the accounting processes.

£32k from EB Scotland and £10k from SSE have been spent on the Kerrysdale ponticum eradication project. Eamonn of Manta Ecology is up to date with reports for this funding. Another £10k is expected from SSE this year with the aim of continuing in the area and putting another application in to EB Scotland for the considerable amount of work still to be done.

## **6. 2023 Work Programme**

There has been no confirmation of funding for sea trout monitoring as of yet but we hope to get the coastal fyke net in June at Loch Ewe. Sweep netting will take place at the usual sites including Flowerdale, Kanaird and Applecross.

Summer field work will include full NEPS electrofishing surveys. EW will go on electrofishing training course to assist PC. It will be necessary to advertise for other electrofishing assistants and provide training for them as Colin Simpson has gained full time employment elsewhere so there is a few local people available who are trained up to assist as it is part-time, irregular work.

There has been more funding for the West of Scotland Herring Hunt project with Edinburgh Napier University. eDNA sampling will begin again at Melvaig in January.

## **7. Conflict of Interest Book**

Assembly of new Conflict of Interest Book adapted from the template used by the Board. PJ will circulate this asap.

## **8. AOCB**

**i) SMEEF Fund (Scottish Marine Environmental Enhancement Fund)**

No deadline for applications so there could be several options for what projects could apply for this fund, including larvae sampling as an extension of the herring project.

**ii) Digital Fisheries Management Plan**

FMS have provided funding for development of a Digital Fisheries Management Plan, created by populating data in an Excel spreadsheet to produce a GIS map and Storymap. EW has successfully applied for a non-profit rate license for our own use of GIS software, which also includes Storymaps. These are both useful tools for creating visuals for reports and grant applications for several of our ongoing projects. The license also includes Survey123, which is a portable smartphone app allowing GPS points to be plotted with data in the field and then automatically synced to create a GIS map. The software will be downloaded by PC and EW on a trial basis in the first instance.

**iii) Rhidorroch project**

A meeting will be arranged with Angus Davidson early in the New Year to discuss the writing up of the project, and further involvement with the Trust.

**iv) West of Scotland Herring Hunt – Edinburgh Napier**

Update for the project has been discussed as part of the 2023 Work programme.

**v) First catch of the season**

Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> February. There are options to do Kinlochewe, Ullapool, round the River Ewe. AM suggested that Jenny Scobie could be asked first to do the Ullapool River as a long supporter of the Trust. PJ and AB agreed, so AM will make enquiries to arrange this.

**vi) River Broom/hydro levels/compensation water**

Adjusting the water flow at the right time of year would be beneficial to the River Broom. A discussion with SSE will be opened for smolts migrating in April.

AM commented that outreach to local schools has faltered due to COVID, and proposed an educational trip out on boats from Ullapool or Gairloch with Trustees, local people and school students – this is an action point to arrange for 2023.

**9. Date of next meeting**

To be arranged via Doodle Poll.