

MINUTES OF TRUSTEES' MEETING

WESTER ROSS FISHERIES TRUST OFFICES		PRESENT:	
DATE:	16 December 2014	David Barclay (DB) Chair	Henry Dalgety (HD)
OPENED AT:	11.00	Angus Davidson (AD)	Bob Kindness (BK)
CLOSED AT:	13.45	APOLOGIES:	
IN ATTENDANCE:		Nigel Pearson (NP)	Melanie Smith (MS)
Peter Cunningham (PC)	Mary Gibson (MG)	Mark Williams (MW)	Richard Greene (RG)
Veronica Mullaney (VM)	Peter Jarosz (PJ)	Ewen Ballantyne (EB)	

1. MATTERS ARISING

1.i There were no matters arising from the 24th October 2014 minutes – which were adopted as an accurate record and were proposed by BK seconded by DB.

1.ii The future of all Fishery Boards in Scotland is still under discussion. However, it seems unlikely that we will see changes in the short term.

2. Meetings (DB) and correspondence

2.i On Monday 27th October, there was a meeting at the Ledgowan Lodge Hotel regarding the Loch Maree Discovery Project. Matt Curran (MC), Eric Verspoor (EV) – both of UHI, Chris MacDonald (CM) of the Forestry Commission, DB and PJ were present. There was general support for the project and it was decided, at this meeting, that the next stage should be the formation of a steering group. The project should link to Biosphere project - the concept for which is currently being promoted. WRFT should seek active engagement with Biosphere and develop links with LMDP.

2.ii On Wednesday 26th November, DB and PJ met up with Peter Kinloch (PK), Ian Lindsay (IL) and Derek Dowsett (DD) from Skye Fisheries Trust (SFT) at the Lochcarron Hotel. For some years now WRFT and SFT have been working together with WRFT biologists doing specific work on Skye at the request of SFT. The main purpose of this meeting was to formalize this working relationship with the production of a Memorandum of Understanding. This formalization (and possible amalgamation of the two trusts under one parent umbrella) is considered desirable following the recommendation, within the Wild Fisheries Review, of the potential for the formation of larger trusts.

2.iii A letter regarding MIAP from Jennie Scobie to the WRASFB chairman and to the WRFT chairman (as well as to some individual trustees – both past and present) was received recently. Both chairs of WRASFB and WRFT will respond separately. MSS are currently looking at developing a locational model that potentially will build on and refine the MIAP model.

3. FINANCE REPORTS

3.i Cash Projections.

The end of November cash projections had been previously emailed to trustees giving everyone an opportunity to read through them and bring any queries to the meeting. No queries were raised.

3.ii Management Reports

VM presented simplified financial reports for the meeting that had been previously emailed out.

3.iii 2014 Accounts and Finance

- The 2013-14 accounts had been previously circulated for approval and were formally signed off by the chairman at the meeting. It now remains for PJ to complete the OSCR on-line form and then submit a copy of the accounts to OSCR before the end of December.
- No education projects were run in the last financial year (2013-14) because of lack of funding and, in the case of Living Lochs, because of a teacher changeover in Plockton High school. There is funding for the high schools' project "Living Lochs" for the next three years. Additionally, the "Pearls in the Classroom" educational project has funding via RAFTS for the next three years. With the addition of some extra funding, this presents an opportunity to run all the educational projects for the next three years. WRASFB is keen to be involved in educational projects and could, potentially, provide some finance. The trust will pull together their prospective educational programme and present it to the board at their March meeting. The Trust potentially needs some £800/per school/per annum to fully support the full educational programme.
- Skye Fisheries Trust are also keen to carry out a Salmon & Trout in the Classroom project but still need to clarify what funds they actually have available.

- The financial year 2013-14 has seen the Trust trading at a breakeven position – in stark contrast to the losses of the previous financial year. There are a number of reasons for this improvement among which are the number of contract work that the Trust managed to achieve and, importantly, significant funding from the Board.

3.iv Insurance

The Trust has continued to make savings on its insurance policies by contracting some of its insurance through its membership of Fish Legal and the Angling Trust

4. BIOLOGIST' REPORTS

PC's report (attached below)

PC's report had been circulated previous to this meeting to trustees. PC offered a précis of the contents of his report to the meeting.

- The Annual Review has been drafted and will shortly be circulated to trustees' with the request for comments to be made prior to the end of December. Once it is finalized, the finished review will be posted on the web site in the New Year.
- PC suggested that we need a better system for collating and submitting catch returns and there is a need to distinguish between sea trout and finnock.
- 2015 sees the second year of production for most of the fish farms in Wester Ross. There is therefore an opportunity to look at the combination of biomass and sea lice numbers. When numbers of sea lice are above the Code of Good Practice, even slightly, and biomass is large, the combination results very high numbers of sea lice and becomes a serious cause of concern for the effects on wild salmonids. Just recently high number of sea lice have been reported via SSPO on a number of different fish farm areas and it remains unclear just why these large numbers of sea lice aren't, apparently, being controlled by treatments.
- The Trust hopes to visit all fish farms next year. In order to facilitate this, the Trust has set up a draft protocol, to which the Board has already input, that the Trust wishes to follow.
- Wrasse are being used on fish farms for sea lice control but there are issues of sourcing wrasse with the need for a code of good practice for their capture and use as well as the requirement for their husbandry within the fish cages. It would be helpful if fish farms could provide evidence/results from the use of wrasse.
- There is a need for funding in support of the Bruachaig restoration project both now and into the future. BK has some 100,000 eggs (from brood-stock) that are available in the New Year and these eggs and their stocking out need to be paid for. Coulin also needs to be paid for their work/time/feed in growing fish on. Furthermore, we still need to decide where to put the fish and eggs and exactly how to monitor. The meeting agreed that eggs/fish from Coulin will be stocked between the first two waterfalls while the eggs from BK will be stocked above the top waterfall.
- PC suggested that there could be a Sea Trout & Sea Lice seminar in 2105.

5. PLANNING AHEAD

5.i Priorities for the year ahead – trustees' input please

Priorities for the short, medium and long term are required and trustees are requested to produce a "wish list" of priorities for our next meeting.

5.ii Loch Maree Project

This project will be included within the "wish list" of priorities and discussed at our next meeting.

5.iii Additional Trustee and Recording of Approved Renewals

DB will approach a potential new trustee in the New Year.

In October 2014 the trusteeships of Nigel Pearson, Bob Kindness and Mark Williams all ended after their terms of three years. All three agreed to stand again and trustees unanimously approved their re-appointments by email.

On the 14th December 2014 the trusteeship of Melanie Smith ended after her term of three years. Melanie also agreed to stand again and trustees unanimously approved her re-appointment by email.

6. AOB

- A new WRFT vehicle is due in mid January and two companies had submitted quotations. It was decided to take up the cheaper option from a new supplier unless the current supplier could match the price.
- The fish farm site at Diabaig is still awaiting a Reporter's decision.
- Catch returns reported for the Torridon river appear to be very high with the average sea trout weights being very large, even though increased catch effort has also been reported.
- There will be a Torridon Area Pilot meeting organized by Crown Estate and involving the Scottish Salmon Company and Marine Harvest Scotland in the New Year.

7. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

NEXT MEETINGS	DATE	LOCATION	TIME
Trustees' meeting	16/12/2014	WRFT Office	11.00
Trustees' meeting	19/03/2015	WRFT Office	11.00
Trustees' meeting	05/06/2015	WRFT Office	11.00

Biologist's report for WRFT Trustees' meeting 16th December 2014

Peter Cunningham info@wrft.org.uk , 9th December 2014

1. Fish surveys

The weather remained mild and remarkably dry through most of November with south-easterly winds prevailing. This enabled further surveys of spawning streams; combining both electro-fishing for juveniles with a look for adult fish around spawning areas. Expeditions visited the Strath More River on Skye (10th – 11th November) to look for sea trout in the spawning burns with JMT Strathaird property manager Ally MacAskill; we also electrofished sites above the lochs recording salmon parr at sites throughout the system. We carried out field work for a contract to survey streams in burns above Leckmelm in relation to possible hydro scheme development (12th & 14th November). Two burns were extensively eroded by the one in 100 year spate on 11th August with movement of a huge amount of large sediment (i.e. boulders) in some places (the Ullapool road was closed for a time). Although widely dispersed, trout were recorded in both burns, including, after 15 minutes of finding very little, a mature male and female trout near spawning habitat high on the hill. Contract report prepared and submitted.

Expeditions surveyed the upper Gruinard (with Ben Rushbrooke & Colin Simpson): on 18th Nov, Gleann na Muice (thank you to Brian Fraser and Stuart Allison of Eilean Darach estate for providing landrover and boat transport to the head of Loch na Sealga); and on 20th Nov, upper Strath na Sealga river (thank you to Bill Whyte, Gruinard Estate, for providing transport). Conditions on both days were ideal for fish surveys: low water and water temperatures above 7C. Our findings were much the same as when last surveyed in October 2011: reasonable densities of fry and parr in the main river; however just one year class of juvenile salmon (2 year old parr) above the Bathing Pool falls (Abhainn Gleann Loch an Nid) and low densities in Gleann na Muice where riparian alder trees continue to die off one by one. We found fresh redds in a few places and fresh signs of otter. The Strath na Sealga headwaters could produce more fish and other wildlife with a collaborative ecosystem restoration and refertilisation project!

Low water provided ideal viewing conditions for locating salmon spawning in other areas. Salmon were videoed on redds in upper Ewe system (. . . videos can be viewed at meeting!); and seen on redds in three places in Little Gruinard River (30th November).

2. WRFT Review . . .

Chunks of this have been written including a juvenile fish survey report for 2013 & 2014. The target is to complete a draft before I go south for Christmas. I'm currently working on the sea trout & sea louse monitoring report. Usual delays so far as getting catch figures from some of the fisheries proprietors or keepers at the end of the season; apart from WRFT Review I've been asked to put a report together for RAFTS / ASFB annual review for the River Ewe – Loch Maree system, some catch figures still awaited . . .

3. Catch figures for 2014 season

Grilse numbers were low for Little Gruinard and Ewe, however the total salmon & grilse catch for the big Gruinard was higher than in 2013 and the Broom reported reasonable numbers of grilse. Final figures for some rivers are awaited including the River Ewe - Loch Maree sea trout fishery where several fish in 3lb to 5.5lb class were taken. PS – figures for Carron just received, thanks Bob – 191 grilse, 93 salmon, 90 sea trout & 274 finnock. That's the best for any river in WRFT area in 2014.

If a long term solution to sea louse problems can be found the potential for recovery remains. In 2014 over 1000 sea trout were caught in the Outer Hebrides, with several in the 7lb – 10lb class¹. The sea trout fisheries of northwest Harris and west South Uist remain productive, and are located furthest away from concentrations of active salmon farms . . .

4. Salmon farming issues

In 2014, most farms within the WRASFB were in the first year of the production cycle and sea louse levels were lower than in 2013. However given high on-farm lice levels reported for some farming areas elsewhere during summer 2014, including farms within the Loch Alsh-Duich area, sea lice may again be a major problem for sea trout in the WRASFB area in 2015. None of the salmon farming companies operating within the WRFT area have been able to demonstrate an ability to manage sea lice levels on all of their farms even to within CoGP treatment threshold levels. Until evidence from Aquaculture is forthcoming, I remain to be convinced that use of wrasse will significantly improve the situation. Early in 2015 I'll contact salmon farms especially those in WRASFB area to see if visits can be agreed following draft revised protocol.

WRASFB has been actively pursuing other initiatives relating to salmon farm management.

¹ See Fish Hebrides <http://www.fishpal.com/Scotland/Hebrides/FishOfTheMonth.asp?dom=Hebrides>

² Scottish Government MPA consultation <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/marine/marine->

5. Bruachaig salmon restoration

I helped Neil Morrison at Coulin hatchery (27/11) with broodstock taken from Kinlochewe River; over 12,000 eggs are incubating for stocking out above the Bruachaig falls in 2015. Mr Milner & three students from Gairloch High School also helped.

Peter Jarosz met Prof Eric Verspoor to discuss options for developing a project to utilise the eggs from Bob Kindness's captive broodstock.

I disagreed with the findings of the fisheries EIA, carried out in support of applications for a proposed hydro-power scheme on the River Bruachaig below Leckie, specifically on whether a waterfall in the gorge would be passable to adult salmon. Although no records of juvenile salmon above this waterfall have so far been found, because of the remoteness of the area, survey teams may have overlooked the area during the period when juvenile salmon may have been present (up until the 1970s or 1980s). Anecdotes report adult fish in headwater spawning streams in the 1960s and 1970s. The developer has agreed, at the request of the WRASFB, that a fish pass be installed over the proposed intake weir should other permissions for this scheme be granted.

6. Scottish Mink Initiative support

Three mink were caught by Gruinard Bay during October – early November. Apart from the SMI app (only a few vols have used the app), support from ghillies, keepers and other volunteers for this project remains good with three new volunteers added to database during the last quarter. Ann-Marie MacMaster (SMI project officer) is planning a visit around February to help to maintain active interest.

7. Scottish Government MPA fisheries management measures consultation (ends on 2nd February 2015)².

There are two new MPAs within the WRFT area: the Wester Ross MPA (Loch Ewe - Summer Isles) and Loch Alsh – Duich MPA. Both MPAs aim to protect and restore flameshell beds (video of Lochcarron flameshell beds can be seen at link below³); the Wester Ross MPA also aims to protect and restore maerl beds. For Loch Ewe, within the Wester Ross MPA, proposed management options for Loch Ewe are: (1) to close just a narrow section along the western part of the loch to scallop dredgers and other mobile gear; (2) to enclose the whole loch to mobile gear. Some parts of the Wester Ross MPA remain inadequately surveyed. Alex Kinninmonth of Scottish Wildlife Trust with support from SNH and Marine Scotland organised an extra survey in early November and recorded previously undocumented maerl beds in the western part of the MPA⁴. Further surveys are required for areas around Greenstone Point between Loch Ewe and Gruinard Bay.

8. Some other things

- **The Highland Biodiversity Action plan** is being reviewed, with a list of 49 possible priority areas for future action. Responses via local biodiversity groups (WREN) requested. Please click on link below if interested in responding⁵.
- **RAFTS MIAP:** PJ & attended a meeting in Inverness on 7th November with other FT biologists and Roger Brooks.
- **RAFTS Invasive Species:** Chris Horrill is preparing multi-species funding applications, to include action to tackle Japaense Knotweed (JK) within the WRFT area.
- **River Broom JK:** John Parrott (Coille Alba) completed a survey of JK in catchment and report in November, to aid subsequent funding bids.
- **Marine Scotland Shildaig Project.** Much information can be found via links on new webpage⁶. Jim Raffell recorded lice larvae in recent plankton tows in Loch Torridon.

How about a **WRFT Sea trout & Sea lice seminar** in collaboration with Marine Scotland early in 2015?

² Scottish Government MPA consultation <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/marine/marine-environment/mpanetwork/MPAMGT/consultation2014>

³ Lochcarron flameshell bed video <http://vimeo.com/103081645>

⁴ Wester Ross MPA maerl bed survey <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-highlands-islands-30224978>

⁵ Highland Biodiversity Action Plan 2015 – 2020 <http://www.highlandbiodiversity.com/highland-bap.asp>

⁶ Shildaig Field station <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/marine/Salmon-Trout-Coarse/Freshwater/Research/Aqint/Shildaig>