

# **TAY DISTRICT SALMON FISHERIES BOARD**

## **ANNUAL PUBLIC MEETING**

Birnam Institute, Birnam, 7pm, Thursday, 31<sup>st</sup> March 2016

## **MINUTES OF MEETING**

### **Board Members Present:**

William Jack (Chairman)  
Iain McLaren  
David Godfrey

### **In attendance**

David Summers (Fisheries Director)  
Inga McGown (Administrator)  
Mike Brown (Operations Manager)  
Craig Duncan (Bailiff)  
Ron Whytock (Bailiff)  
Tom McGinn (Bailiff)

Also in attendance were 22 members of the public.

Before the meeting, copies of the Accounts for the year ending 31 December 2014 and the Annual Report 2014/15 were circulated to everyone, and copies of the Agenda and Minutes from 2015 meeting were available as hard copies (all having been on the website previously).

The Chairman opened the fourth Annual Public Meeting by welcoming all attendees, before stating that there would be a run through of the 2014 Accounts, as presented in the Annual Report, followed by a brief overview from the bailiffing team, before David Summers looked back at what the Board had achieved in the last year and the goals for the coming year. Finally, there would be an opportunity for all attendees to ask the Board any questions.

### **Annual Report and Accounts:**

IMcG explained that the 2015 accounts would be with the auditor shortly, and that the 2014 accounts were similar to last year, with the £35,757 surplus being explained largely by a £30k provision for revaluation appeals being released. She went on to explain that provisions were made most years to cover any proprietors who had applied for and received revaluation

appeals. These were backdated usually to the last year that a revaluation had taken place, currently 2010, and could therefore potentially be thousands of pounds. The provision had been released as, after a consultation with the valuation assessor, it was felt no more appeals would be upheld in the near future.

She then went on to show the total income for the year, with a comparison back to 2009, and corresponding expenditure figures.

**Bailiffing Activity:**

Ron Whytock from the Bailiff team took a moment to welcome Mike Brown to the team, before giving a brief overview of bailiffing activities throughout the year. He ended by asking all present to spread the word that the bailiffs would be keen to hear any information from anyone on the river regarding illegal fishing activities, and that the bailiff team would follow up all enquiries.

**Activities over past year and activities for coming year:**

DS then went on to talk about the activities the Board had undertaken in the past year, and what was forthcoming for this year, and in particular highlighted the following areas:

**1. Catches:**

Overall, 2015 had been a better year than the previous year, with May and June showing particularly marked improvement. The most outstanding catches had been on the middle Tay, particularly in the latter part of the Spring. Compared to the five year average, most beats elsewhere were slightly down, with a few exceptions. The possible causes of this could have been the fact that May had been the coolest on record since 1996/7, coinciding with a reasonably good run of salmon as evidenced by the fish counters. The latter suggested a possible swing from grilse to salmon (2014 saw a poor return of grilse, hinting at problems at sea).

**2. Last Year's Activities ~ 2015:**

River Garry Rewatering:

DS explained that the Garry had once been an important salmon river, but that most of the Garry tributaries were currently abstracted by SSE, and it has now no salmon in its upper reaches. The EU Water Framework Directive should have seen the Garry rewatered by the end of December 2015, which was to be led by SEPA, but this had yet to happen. The Board have been in talks with both SSE and SEPA and it appears an agreement may be close.

Tummel Smolt Project:

DS explained that this project would now be progressing with the joint cooperation of Marine Scotland Science, Tay Foundation, Tay District Salmon Fisheries Board and SSE. The project involves the purchase of a rotary screw trap, which will be sited in the Errochty Water, and will be used to trap smolts. The smolts are then to be PIT tagged (rather like a dog microchip), and then freed to make their descent through

Pitlochry dam. From there they travel out to sea, and will be detected by a PIT tag reading device on their return up the fish pass. This will then give us some indication as to marine survival rates.

The project can be extended to assess the number of smolts who make it through hydro turbines, and indeed the project could extend to other geographical areas in time.

#### Hatchery:

DS explained that most of our hatchery operations involve stocking out eyed ova and unfed fry, with a few thousand being fed on to the parr stage and then stocked out. We are currently concentrating stocking the River Garry to kickstart that river's salmon population once it is finally rewatered.

He went on to mention that the Board has done a number of stocking out trials with fed parr, with the outcome being that in rivers with reasonable chemical fertility, fed ones seem to do better than eyed ova, but in nutrient poor areas fed ones tend not to do so well.

#### Monitoring the Salmon Stock:

Generally speaking DS said that electrofishing surveys in 2015 continued to show juvenile stocks within their normal range, including sites on the Lyon and Fillan. One regular site was on the Ordie Burn which had recently suffered from pollution. It would be interesting to see how that burn's salmon stocks in future compare with prior years data. However, a notable exception to the general pattern was a number of sites in the upper Almond where 2015 saw the fry numbers well down. This will be monitored closely in 2016.

#### Other news in 2015:

DS informed the attendees that the Tay Ghillies Association had very generously purchased £5k of surveillance equipment to the bailiffs, for which the Board was very thankful.

Unfortunately, Duncan Glass BEM had passed away during the year. He had been a real force behind the TGA for many years and his loss will be sorely missed.

The Ericht had seen a potential blocking by a tree in Craighall Gorge but this had been removed under very challenging circumstances.

The Alyth floods had seen a weir disappear. There had been some concern that the weir was affecting fish passage, but this would no longer be an issue.

### **3. 2016 Activities:**

DS explained that an Archimedes screw turbine at Pitcastle would be operational this year or next, and that the Board was expecting to be contracted to monitor smolts as of next year.

He also pointed out that the Tay Foundation is developing in conjunction with the University of the Highlands and Islands a genetics marking and mapping exercise on the upper Lyon.

#### **4. Wild Fisheries Reform:**

DS explained the history of the Wild Fisheries Review to the assembled audience, explaining that DSFBs would be abolished, new funding would have to be sought, and there was a hint that angling development would be funded by a rod licence system.

A quota and carcass tagging system had originally been proposed in early 2015 for any salmon killed, however the idea had since been abandoned in favour of a system of river categorisation. All rivers were now categorised into one of three categories with mandatory catch and release applying to rivers deemed to be in category 3 from 1 April. From 1<sup>st</sup> April, all coastal netting is also to be suspended for 3 years, when it will be reviewed, and estuary netters will have to use carcass tags. All rivers will require conservation plans, and will be reviewed every year and re-categorised where necessary.

#### **Summing up**

The Chairman then summarised that the two main concerns for the Board at present were the rewatering of the Garry, which DS has been working on for well over a decade, and it is thought we are now ready to reach a conclusion. Coupled with that, the smolt tagging project is of utmost importance, and will at last give us some understanding of smolt mortality rate at sea.

#### **There then followed a question and answer session:**

Sporting/Fishing rates:

A member of the audience asked whether it was true that, with the possible reintroduction of sporting rates, if a fishery were not connected to the sporting estate then the owner should not have to pay fishing rates.

DS replied that the reintroduction of sporting rates did not apply to fishings, and that there was no change to paying the levy at present, and indeed it seemed very likely that the salmon levy would continue in some form even after the Wild Fisheries Reform process was concluded.

Loss of wildlife and heather affecting salmon population:

A member of the audience commented that hares and red grouse used to be plentiful around Killin, but were in decline, as was heather because of increased grazing by sheep. He wondered if this had any impact on the salmon population.

DS replied that perhaps that may have had some impact, but if you look at old photographs in St Andrews University online historic photo archive, even in the early 1900s parts of the Dochart were quite similar to their present condition with banks similarly eroded. The fact that marine survival rates were higher years ago complicates this issue.

Resources for producing conservation plans:

A member of the audience asked that since the Earn and the Eden are now category 3 and therefore require a conservation plan, who would actually do the plan?

DS replied that MSS had issued a conservation plan template a few weeks previously to which biologists from all boards and trusts were given a handful of days to respond. The biologists made it clear this was not something that could be rushed and a committee was set up, which DS feeds into. DS considered that a significant amount of work would be needed before the plan templates would be suitable for their intended use. DS was happy to send out a copy of the proposed plan to anyone who requested it.

Categorisation issues:

A member of the audience asked how category 3 could be avoided when a river had low flow and catches were therefore low also. He was concerned that angling clubs would fold. DS replied that he recognised this was a major issue as the methodology at present did not incorporate any means of compensating for this problem in rivers that only had autumn salmon runs.

The Government had promised £100k to help angling clubs, but had made it clear that this money was not to be given to the clubs to help offset financial difficulties, but rather to pay for promotion to encourage all members to catch and release. It was as yet unclear who would actually receive the money. One member of the audience suggested advertising agencies would benefit.

Hatchery capacity:

A member of the audience asked at what capacity the hatchery was running at, to which DS replied about 50%. The member of the public then asked whether some thought may be given to stocking out in the Earn and Eden.

DS replied that he would talk to the hatchery manager about it, but in his experience back end fish from the Earn and Eden if taken in into captivity too early were usually not tough enough to survive hatchery conditions and a high mortality rate from fungus could often be the norm for these fish. Such fish might not easily be reconditioned.

Garry concerns:

A member of the audience stated that he had looked at the heck at the bottom of the Garry at Struan, which was in a bad state of repair and sharp metal spikes may damage fish. DS replied that SSE were aware of the situation and that it would be part of forthcoming talks on the subject.

Crayfish:

A member of the audience enquired as to whether crayfish were increasing and spreading their numbers. DS replied that crayfish had been introduced many years ago, and had been found in the Shee area. The Board had set traps this summer and found that they had spread at least several miles downstream from the original source point. It seems they are spreading and it might not be long before they reach the River Isla.

Catch and Release:

A member of the audience asked whether catch and release could be extended into May, to which the Chairman replied that the Board would have been happy to extend catch and release beyond March, but that it does recommend no killing of fish until the end of May. The vast majority of people do adhere to the recommendations, and if the Board knows of any beats who are killing many fish, they do visit the beat and make recommendations in person. However, perhaps in future Fishery Management Organisations may have more "teeth" and be able to enforce this rule.

A member of the audience congratulated the Board on their informative presentation.

There were no further questions and the Chairman then thanked everyone for coming and closed the meeting.