**MINUTES**

**of the Meeting of**

**RIVER BLADNOCH DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD**

**held at**

**The Bruce Hotel, Newton Stewart**

**at 5:00pm on Wednesday 18th May 2016**

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**Present:**

Sir Michael Wigan (Chair)

Andrew Gladstone

Dick Scott

Malcolm Adkin

Colin Richardson

John Haley

Jonathan Haley

**Also in attendance:**

Peter Murray-Clark

Mark Godfrey

Michael McNeil

Charlie McNeil

And later:

James Ribbens from GFT

**Minutes**

The Minutes of the last meeting were in fact the Minutes of the Annual General Meeting and would be left for approval at this year’s Annual General Meeting and accordingly matters arising therefrom were then discussed as follows.

1. Conservation

This was in fact discussed later in the meeting once Jamie Ribbens had arrived but when he did he explained that the Board were responsible for completing and submitting a Conservation Plan to the Scottish Ministers but the GFT would produce all the necessary information for completing the spreadsheet on behalf of the Board for the Board’s final approval.

He explained that no national plan would be produced until all the rivers had put in their conservation plans. The Scottish Ministers had expected these to be in by the end of May but had agreed now to extend this time limit.

In particular he was asked to highlight acidity due to afforestation, the benefits of liming gained from the experiments on the Cree and the Fleet and the benefits of managing the gravel spawning grounds.

2. Classification of Rivers

The Chairman explained that Bladnoch was in Classification 3 meaning that no fish could be kept and the Trust had explained to him the necessity for ensuring that all proprietors completed their catch returns to give as complete a picture as possible to Marine Scotland.

3. Treasurer’s Report

The Treasurer advised that there was currently a surplus of just short of £3,400 and that all bar 2 or 3 proprietors had paid their levy for the current year with The Galloway Fisheries Trust having received its last interim payment last month, the next payment being due in October.

4. Payment to Jon Webb

The Chairman advised that he had taken the responsibility on his own shoulders for instructing Jon Webb in respect of the planning applications on The Tarff, which had subsequently been withdrawn, and the Barhoise. He explained that he had spoken to one or two board members before authorising this and the Board confirmed that they were happy with this. The Chairman advised that he had raised a query with the planners regarding the wording of one of the conditions in the Planning Consent but had not yet received an answer. Charlie McNeill advised that they themselves had not yet had a chance to go through all the conditions in detail but he thought that what this condition was relating to was to ensure that there was always an adequate flow of water over the falls during the sensitive periods. It was noted that there was nothing in the conditions regarding smolts and this was a big concern. Michael McNeill advised the meeting that the smolts should in fact go through the system without coming to any harm and indeed perhaps less harm than would come to them going over the falls in a spate.

5. Distillery

It was noted that the Distillery had cleaned out the lade to increase the flow of water and it was agreed that a smolt screen would be required at the mouth of this lade. When Jamie Ribbens joined the meeting he confirmed that the GFT had carried out the Fish Rescue Plan on the lade prior to dredging and had raised the concern regarding screening. The Distillery had not yet applied for an Abstraction Licence but Jamie understood from John Gorman at SEPA that when they do apply there is likely to be a condition regarding the lade being duly screened for smolts for 365 days a year.

Jamie Ribbens advised that in his opinion the weir may be more of a problem to ascending salmon caused by more water being taken away down the lade. He had raised his concerns with SNH and SEPA.

John Haley had raised the point that as well as dredging the lade they appear to have cut down a lot of trees, a number of which had branches hanging into the river. It was agreed that he should write a letter of complaint to SNH as Cotland Wood was a SSSI.

Jonathan Haley then advised the meeting that the GFT should be commended on the very positive results from the recent egg box exercise on the Upper Bladnoch. He advised that some progress was being made with the forestry in the Polbae area but this was ongoing and expressed concerns regarding the impacting of or silting up of gravel. Jamie confirmed that the GFT will take note and put this in their report to the Board together with details of the liming evidence obtained from the Cree and the Fleet.

6. Dirnow Planting

This had been raised at the AGM where Michael McNeill was concerned that the GFT had indicated that it was not an acidity problem. Jamie explained that the GFT in objecting to planning applications for planting had to prioritise to have the best possible affect and accordingly they took the point at which salmon cannot survive and object or raise concerns regarding all applications above that point and are less likely to raise issues regarding acidification to any applications below.

Michael McNeil suggested that if a forest is a source of acidification then the GFT should not be saying it is alright. Jamie was asked what recent planting applications had been objected to and he advised that there had been none recently other than one at Polbae. His main current concern related to replanting. He explained that the Peat Restoration Plan, which requires the removal of 250 ha of Sitka spruce at Polbae had been turned down by the Forestry Commission but Forest Enterprise was appealing it and GFT would support this appeal. However, there is pressure from the Scottish Government that planting targets will not be met and Jamie was very concerned that GFT did not recently receive word of one new planting near New Galloway. Michael McNeill advised that he was aware of two farms near him which may come on the market in the next couple years and it is quite likely they would go to forestry.

Accordingly the Clerk was asked to write to the Forestry Commission requesting that the Board receive notification of all planning applications for planting in the Bladnoch catchment area and this should be sent to John Dougan at the Dumfries office.

The Chairman intimated that in the North of Scotland replanting was not allowed on peat and accordingly a lot of replanting was reduced from 100% to 60% or less.

7. Electro Fishing

Michael McNeill advised that the water tests he carried out last year showed no better results than the tests carried out in 1989. Jamie advised that the GFT had a network of six electrofishing sites across the headwaters of Bladnoch required to monitor conifer felling and further electrofishing sites lower down the catchment to monitor overall stocks. The results would be provided to the Board in due course. He advised that the fish farm now carried out a daily count of smolts and advised that from the 27th March 1,400 had been caught and released by the end of April, with another 800 subsequent to that.

8. Wild Fisheries Bill

The Chairman advised that on behalf of the Board he had lodged a response within the consultation period to this very badly drafted bill. This was along the lines which the Board had previously discussed, namely that if the Bladnoch were to join in a fishery management group then it should be with rivers of similar profiles however he didn’t expect the response to change the review in any way. There was no indication of time scale but clearly finance was the key issue which he believed was why rod licence was still on the agenda.

It was noted that fish farms did not allow DNA samples to be taken and they were legally entitled to take this position however it was noted that the Scottish Government was coming under increasing pressure from Europe on the question of smolts being killed by sea lice and this may force a change in legislation regarding fish farms and the provision of DNA. One of the main worries is that fish farm broodstock instead of being buried as per best practice are simply released into the wild.

9. Brood Stock/Hatchery

Jamie advised that the Board would require to get permission for brood stock capture early to leave enough time for SNH to take two or three months to consider it before granting licences. Accordingly he would remind the Board in early September.

Last season it had been too late for the Tarff by the time Marine Scotland License came through but did take a number of fish from the Barhoise Burn fish trap. A total of around 15,000 fry were stocked into the upper Bladnoch (Glassoch Burn and Polbae Burn) and some further eggs used on the egg box experiments. He also advised that the Trust now had a new PH probe which had cost nearly £10,000 which was being used to sample various locations in the upper river.

It was noted that the Board favoured a strong brood stock programme and felt fully justified in stocking acidified areas.

10. Tideline Nettings

The netting for sea trout was still going on as normal but it was noted that sea bass netting may well be affected by the new Sea Bass Regulations.

11. Any other business

1. The Chairman proposed that Mark Davies from the fish farm should be co-opted onto the Board and this was agreed without objection.

2. Conservation Limits

It was pointed out to the meeting that Marine Scotland automatically converted 40% of fish caught after a certain date as grilse rather than salmon on the base that they considered anglers would not be able to tell the difference. This clearly affected the classification of the river. Accordingly the Cree, Luce, Bladnoch and Urr were asking for anglers to collect scales and data such as length and whether the fish was a grilse or a salmon and provide these to the GFT to analyse.

3. Colin Richardson felt SNH should have been at the meeting and the Clerk was asked to specifically invite them to the next.

4. It was noted that Colin had set up the Kirkcowan Angling Club which now had a strong membership and this was to be applauded.

5. Next meeting was fixed for Tuesday 20th September 2016 subject to confirmation from the Chairman that he was available that day.

There to be no further business the meeting closed at 6:50pm.