**RIVER BLADNOCH DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD**

**MINUTES**

**of the Annual Meeting of the Proprietors and Members of the Public**

**Annual General Meeting**

**held at**

**The Bruce Hotel, Newton Stewart**

**on Monday 21st November 2016 at 6.30pm**

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1. **Board Members Present**

Colin Richardson

John Haley

Dick Scott

 **Also in Attendance**

 Peter Murray (Clerk)

Calum Sinclair (Scottish National Heritage)

 Jamie Ribbens (Galloway Fishery Trust)

 M Godfrey

 M McNeill

C McNeill

C Hockley

P Hockley

2. **Apologies**

 The Clerk intimated apologies from:-

Malcolm Adkins, Jonathon Haley and the Chairman, Sir Michael Wigan who had asked the Clerk to chair the meeting in his absence. There being no objection, the Clerk duly took the Chair.

3. **Minutes**

 Minutes of the last meeting held on 25th November 2015 along with the Chairman’s Report and the Accounts were circulated and time was taken for those present to consider these.

4. **Matters Arising from Chairman’s Report**

1. With regard to the Wild Fisheries Review Colin Richardson advised the meeting that the Cree Board will have a representative at the next meeting of the Board.

2 Michael McNeill expressed his total disagreement with the Chairman’s comments in Paragraph 3 of his Report regarding “a year of low water levels”. He felt that other than October there had been relatively good water throughout the year even although it was noted from the website that the gauge only recorded two feet on six occasions since April. Mark Godfrey supported Mr McNeill in this view. With regard to Paragraph 7 of the Report relating to the categorisation of the river it was noted that although it was not officially confirmed that the Bladnoch would be into Category 2 it was very likely and that the position would be reviewed annually. It was emphasised that the proprietors should ensure that they make full returns to Marine Scotland at the end of each year as these count towards a decision on categorisation. It was noted the Clerk would be writing to proprietors regarding this.

 It was also noted that the Board would be looking at reviewing its rules at the next meeting.

 Michael McNeill pointed out that taking the nets off made no difference whatsoever to the fishing and accordingly he couldn’t see what difference would be made by anglers killing a few fish. The main problems were at sea and with the head-waters.

 The question was put to Callum Sinclair as to whether the Bladnoch should have been designated an SAC (Special Area of Conservation) and he responded that, yes, because of the importance of the spring fish run. It was the most important river matter in Dumfries and Galloway. It was however put to him that despite being a Special Area of Conservation there had been no improvement and Callum was asked to find out what had been spent overall as a result of the SAC designation.

It was noted that Marine Scotland were looking into the possibility of fish counters on various rivers and the Bladnoch being an SAC had been put forward.

Liming

Considerable discussion took place regarding the possibility of liming. It was noted that previously liming was experimental and therefore could not be carried out on the Bladnoch whilst it was an SAC. Trials on the Fleet and the Cree were proving positive although it was thought that it would not have any effect on heavily peated areas. The main problem still remained – funding.

It was noted that SNH had been against liming many years ago however this had been due to the lack of detail provided at that time and Callum Sinclair confirmed that SNH would be prepared to look at any new proposals the Board cared to put forward.

With regard to funding it was noted that funds should become available through the Renewable Energy projects going on in the area and accordingly the GFT was asked to give a report and recommendation to the Board which the Board could take forward possibly with an application for such funding.

Water Quality

The matter was again raised of SEPA’s historical failure to supply adequate information to the Board and the meeting felt the Board should consider making an application to SEPA under the Freedom of Information Procedure.

Jamie Ribbens advised that the GFT’s tests showed that the Bladnoch was lagging behind the other local rivers which were showing signs of revival and the feeling at the moment of the GFT that this was due to the heavily peated areas and was why the GFT was pushing the peat restoration project. He advised that the SAC designation had indeed affected new forest planting by introducing restrictions and John Gorman at SEPA was helping enforce this. It was however noted with concern the Government’s wish for replanting.

Galloway Fisheries Trust Report

Jamie Ribbens provided handouts to the meeting which were circulated and discussed. These contained more information on the peat restoration project and the planting restrictions along with electrofishing results. A separate note was produced regarding the River Bladnoch Salmon Restoration Plan for the Board to take forward.

5. **Accounts**

The accounts having been circulated no queries were raised thereon and they would be passed to the Board at the next meeting for approval.

6. **AOCB**

 Michael McNeill advised the meeting that there was a very large oak tree felled across the river at the Barhoise Falls where there is a very steep bank. He considered this could well be interfering with the run of salmon and felt the Board had a duty to remove it.

The question was raised regarding the disturbance of redds and Jamie Ribbens advised that there is not significant movement compared with other rivers.

Fry

It was noted that in some English rivers the fry was completely wiped out and no explanation for it.

John Haley asked for Jamie Ribbens views on the Scottish Government taking over control from the Forestry Commission. Jamie advised his main concern was the retiral of Rob Souter has he had been a good supporter of conservation and GFT was waiting to see if he was able to get his team in place before the change.

Distillery Lade

A discussion took place regarding the Distillery Lade and GFT confirmed that they were aware of the position and that the Distillery would require to obtain a licence before they were able to operate it. They would need both a Licence to Operate and an Abstraction Licence in which connection it was noted that the abstraction point was where it joined the river. The main concern was not so much smolts going down the lade but rather enough water remaining in the river for the smolts to get over the weir.

Thanks were expressed to Kirckowan Angling Club for their support during the year

There being no further business the meeting closed at 8.15pm.

**DRAFT:- PMM/RL RIVEB01-11**