

**MINUTES OF MEETING**  
**of**  
**HELMSDALE DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD**  
**held at Kildonan Hall, Helmsdale, Sutherland**  
**on Saturday, 6<sup>th</sup> May 2017 at 10.35am**

**PRESENT**

Sir John Nutting Bt. QC  
Sir Algernon Heber Percy  
Neil McCorquodale  
William Southall  
Alexander Darwall  
George Stephenson  
Donald Sutherland  
Robert Mackay

**IN ATTENDANCE**

Sir Michael Wigan Bt. - Fishery Manager  
Norman Wright - Clerk

**CHAIR**

Sir John Nutting took the Chair

**APOLOGIES**

None

**MINUTES OF LAST MEETINGS**

The Minutes of the Last Meeting held at Kildonan Hall, Helmsdale on Saturday, 7<sup>th</sup> of May 2016, were tabled, considered, approved and signed by Sir John. The Minutes of the Triennial Election held on 7<sup>th</sup> May 2016 at 2.55pm and the First Committee Meeting thereafter on said date at 2.58pm were tabled, considered, approved and signed by Sir John.

**MATTERS ARISING**

None

## **NEW MEMBERS**

George Stephenson was co-opted to replace Jeremy P F Clay who died on 19<sup>th</sup> February 2017. Alexander Darwall was co-opted to replace Lucy Reeves who resigned on 19<sup>th</sup> April 2017.

## **ACCOUNTS**

The Audited Accounts for the year to 31<sup>st</sup> January 2017, prepared by Saffery Champness, Chartered Accountants, Inverness were tabled, considered, approved and signed by the Chairman.

## **REPORT FOR 2016**

The Clerk's Report for 2016, was tabled, considered, approved and signed by the Clerk.

## **BAILIFFS**

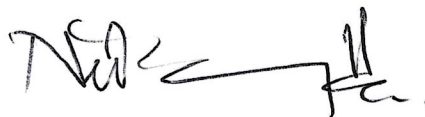
The current Bailiffs confirmed as Peter Quail, Robert Henderson and John Macleod.

## **AOB**

None

## **NEXT MEETING**

This will be held at 2pm on Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> May 2018 at Kildonan Hall, Helmsdale.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Neil' followed by a stylized flourish and a period.

**MINUTES OF THE FOURTH ANNUAL MEETING**  
**of**  
**HELMSDALE DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD**  
**held at Kildonan Hall, Helmsdale,**  
**on Saturday, 6th May 2017 at 11am**

**PRESENT**

Sir John Nutting Bt. QC  
Sir Algernon Heber Percy  
Neil McCorquodale  
William Southall  
Donald Sutherland  
Robert Mackay  
Alexander Darwall  
George Stephenson

**IN ATTENDANCE**

Sir Michael Wigan Bt. - Fishery Manager  
Norman Wright - Clerk  
Peter Quail - Head Bailiff  
Various Attendees (3)

**CHAIR**

Sir John Nutting Bt. QC took the Chair.

**APOLOGIES**

None

**MINUTES OF LAST MEETING**

The Minutes of the Third Annual Meeting held on Saturday, 7th May 2016 were tabled, considered, approved and signed by the Chairman.

**MATTERS ARISING**

- a) Sir John Nutting intimated that he would be resigning as Chairman effective on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2018. Neil McCorquodale was confirmed as the new Chairman effective from said date. A vote of thanks was given to Sir John by Neil McCorquodale on behalf of the Board, for all his work in the past 15 years.

- b) The Chairman intimated the death of Jeremy Clay on 19<sup>th</sup> February 2017, which will be an incalculable loss to the River. A Memorial Service is to be held in Hereford Cathedral on 6<sup>th</sup> July 2017.
- c) The Chairman welcomed Alexander Darwall and George Stephenson to the Board.

### **CATCHES**

The 2016 figures for all of Scotland are 55,000 Salmon and Grills caught, which is 80% of the average for the previous 5 years. Catch and release is now 90% country wide. Marine Scotland long term data shows that Springers are about level over the last 20 years, but summer fish have declined, so the problem relates to the summer catch. Apparently only 34 farmed fish declared as caught for all of Scotland and this seems a low figure, although there are considerable problems separating farmed from wild fish. The Ghillies to be notified that if in doubt about the origin of the fish, it should be killed. The source of any farmed fish in the Helmsdale would be from Orkney and Shetland. No prosecutions relating to major escapes from Fish Farms. Noted that very considerable investment being made into onshore Fish Farms with progress expected in 2 years. Mortality in onshore farms is likely to be 2/3%, whereas at sea it is 30%.

### **CONSERVATION GRADES**

The Helmsdale and North Esk have counters which closely correlate. Last year the Scottish Government in order to convince NASCO that it had a Conservation Policy allocated a number between 1 and 3 to each river as a Conservation Grade. Helmsdale received a grading of 1 which means that we can set our own catch and release policy. However, Grade 3 means that no catches allowed and visitor numbers for such a River would decline. Vociferous comment to the Scottish Government produced revised gradings in 2017. From 16 Grade 1 Rivers in 2016, there are now 88 in 2017. The number of Grade 3 Rivers is now very low. The methodology used for the Scottish Government has been criticised severely, it is based on a wetted area which does not take into account whether it is rock or peat underneath rather than gravel. The change to the Conservation Grades is a precursor to more Fish Farms. Higher wild fish numbers, will allow Fish Farm expansion. Discussion on our catch and release produced consensus that our policy is correct. Comment noted that not being able to catch even 1 fish will drive fishers away

### **OPEN DAYS**

Despite terrible weather, anglers braved the conditions but no fish were caught. A very popular social event which brings business to Helmsdale at a quiet time of year. Event to be repeated in 2018.

### **ELECTRO FISHING**

In 2016, carried out normal programme of electro fishing. Our team is certificated to do so and also carried out work for the Forestry Commission and received remuneration shown in the Accounts. Our programme is very effective now, as it has built up a record of the health of the Upper catchment, which shows that not enough wild fish and thus we can release from the Hatchery. The research programme with Professor Gage should produce in 6 years time, a conclusion as whether the hatchery contributes to the river, or not.

## **HATCHERY**

150,000 eggs obtained with a 99% survivor rate. No spate problems this year as the winter was very dry.

## **DAM**

This was rebuilt in 1970 with 3 gates instead of 2 previously. It is inspected annually for insurance purposes. However there is a statutory inspection under the Reservoirs (Scotland) Act 2011 and we passed this last year. It was carried out by Allen Gordon, Engineers in Inverness and the next statutory inspection is 2021. The Dam is a major benefit as it provides compensation water for 90 days at 4" on the gauge. It can be used in spring, but also in November if the redds are exposed and require to be covered. Extra water can be provided for fish to move upstream away from seals in the Harbour. The fish pass was considered but noted that it is large enough for big fish.

## **SEALS**

We are part of the Moray Firth Seal Group which is run by the Director of the Spey Board. There is a licence for 8 grey seals but no common seals. A request to include common seals has been refused.

Conservationists have noted fish farmers killing seals so they have lobbied in the USA, a major importer of farmed Salmon, who have decided that there will be a ban in 5 years if the problem is not resolved. The outlook is not good, as a request to kill a rogue seal in Aberdeenshire, based on detailed evidence (expensive to obtain) was refused by SNH.

Ghillies to be instructed to note seal damage on their weekly returns, and this data can be passed on quarterly to the Seal Group.

## **FISHERIES MANAGEMENT ORGANISATION**

The Chairman gave the background to the Wild Fishery Review Report for 2016 which proposed Fishery Management Organisations (FMO). Lord Thurso had addressed the Board last year and he was keen to head off at the pass, any government imposed structure which would include the west coast as part of a northern FMO. Then considered any benefits in a voluntary FMO or remain independent. A large FMO would generate considerable cost, and the District Board would be influenced by comments from the representatives of salmon anglers. They responded that they did not see the case for any change from the current system. The Chairman commented that the Scottish Government had taken 4 years at a huge cost in time and money, to reach the conclusion that no change was required, and thus the Board were entitled to note the decision of Government, and carry on as before.

## **NEXT MEETING**

The next Annual Meeting will be held on 12<sup>th</sup> May 2018 at 2.15pm in Kildonan Hall, Helmsdale, Sutherland

