

MINUTES OF THE NINTH ANNUAL MEETING

Of

HELMSDALE DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD

**Held at Kildonan Hall, Helmsdale, Sutherland on Saturday 6th May,
2023 at 4.15p.m.**

PRESENT

Neil McCorquodale

Sir John Nutting Bt. QC.

Lady Wigan

Donald Sutherland

Alexander Darwall

George Stephenson

William Jappy

Sir Algernon Heber- Percy

IN ATTENDANCE

Sir Michael Wigan Bt. – Fishery Manager

Martin Mackay – Clerk

Peter Quail – Head Bailiff

Attendees – Mrs D. Darwall, Robert Henderson, John McLeod, John Young

CHAIR

Neil McCorquodale took the Chair.

APOLOGIES

None

MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

The Minute of the last public meeting held on 07 May 2022 was approved.

MATTERS ARISING

There were no matters arising.

ACCOUNTS

The Audited Accounts for the year to 31 December 2022 prepared by Saffery Champness, Chartered Accountants were tabled, considered and subject to the need to add reference to William Jappy having been co-opted as a member were approved.

REPORT FOR 2022

The Report for 2022 was tabled considered and approved.

CATCHES

Catches for the 2022 season were 1163 on the private beats. There were 78 fish caught to the end of Week 9 and it has been reported that 20-25 have been caught for the week of this meeting.

CONSERVATION GRADES

The River has been classified as Grade Two, which is disappointing given the demonstrable health of young salmon in the River. Discussions are ongoing.

CATCH AND RELEASE

The return rate for 2022 was again around 97%. Those catching a fish should be mindful of best practice when removing fish hooks prior to return of the fish and the taking of photographs of the fish out of the water. Any pink salmon caught are to be killed.

RESEARCH

15 sites were electro-fished in 2022. The National electro-fishing programme for Scotland ("NEPS") figures released for 2021 indicate that the Helmsdale river has the second highest count of young salmon from a sample of 48 Scottish Rivers.

PREDATOR CONTROL

The Board has obtained a licence to control sawbills. The licence expires on 10 May 2023 and a renewal will be requested. Three whole of river counts are being

undertaken each year. It was noted that Cormorants are also in widespread evidence.

HATCHERY

52 broodstock fish were used and approximately 150,000 ova obtained.

RIVER WORKS

A CAR licence was obtained from SEPA to allow the completion of some bank repairs at Jetty Stream in collaboration with Suisgill Estate. Approximately 450 tonnes of rock material was brought onto site. Top soiling and seeding works are still to be completed.

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OPEN DAYS

There was a parade with Sutherland Schools Pipe Band on January 11th. 165 visitors signed in but no fish were caught.

BEATRICE WINDFARM

This windfarm offshore from Dunbeath now contains in the region of 200 turbines and covers 130 km². There is anecdotal evidence from local fisherman that fishing has been affected in the area. Salmon are not thought to swim within the area of the windfarm but will swim within the areas through which the electro -magnetic cables running to the shore are located. Anecdotal evidence to date suggests that these cables may affect the white fish which swim in deeper water, but there is nothing to suggest that salmon (which typically swim closer to the surface) are affected. To date, there has been no effort made to analyse, through science, the affect of these cables on any fish. Although it is acknowledged that this is an issue completely outwith the control of this Board, it is encouraging that there is no evidence to date that the windfarm or the cables have affected salmon in the sea.

FISHERY PROTECTION

No poaching events recorded in 2021. There have been a number of unauthorised vehicles parking at Upper Caen and this will be monitored.

FISH COUNTER

The Counter is broken and proposals for its repair are work in progress. Funding assistance has been sought for repairs, but the Board may need to consider a financing of the repair themselves. A new hut is incorporated into the planned repair.

SCHOOLS PROGRAMME

These will start again in October. Last year 2 bus loads of children attended. They experienced electrofishing and observed fry. The buses are provided at the expense of the Board.

FISH DISEASE AND NON NATIVE THREATS

Pink Salmon have a two year life cycle and so there is a chance that increased numbers will be observed this year. There is no evidence of this to date. All pink fish are to be killed and all huts will have photographs to ease identification. No serious threat from Saprolegnia in 2022.

AOB

All work done to huts has been well received and this is an improvement.

NEXT MEETING

This will be held at 11.15 am on Saturday 11th May 2024 at Kildonan Hall, Helmsdale.