

MINUTES OF THE NINTH ANNUAL MEETING

Of

HELMSDALE DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD

**Held at Kildonan Hall, Helmsdale, Sutherland on Saturday 11th May,
2024 at 11.15 a.m.**

PRESENT

Neil McCorquodale

Lady Wigan

Donald Sutherland

Alexander Darwall

George Stephenson

William Jappy

Sir Algernon Heber- Percy

Anson MacAuslan as Mandatory for Auchentoul Estate

IN ATTENDANCE

Sir Michael Wigan Bt. – Fishery Manager

Martin Mackay – Clerk

Peter Quail – Head Bailiff

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

CHAIR

Neil McCorquodale took the Chair.

APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Sir John Nutting K.C. B.t.

MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

The Minute of the last public meeting held on 06 May 2023 was approved.

MATTERS ARISING

There were no matters arising.

ACCOUNTS

The Audited Accounts for the year to 31 December 2023 prepared by Saffery Champness, Chartered Accountants were tabled, considered and approved.

REPORT FOR 2023

The Report for 2023 was tabled considered and approved.

CATCHES

Catches for the 2023 season were 1108 on the private beats. There were 105 fish caught up 05 May and it has been reported that around 50 have been caught for the week of this meeting.

FLOOD DAMAGE

It was noted that the river has been altered by the winter spates and that fish are being caught in unexpected locations. There appears to have been damage done to established lies at 4 & 5 below, but it currently too early to assess the extent.

CONSERVATION GRADES

The River has been restored to a Grade One classification.

CATCH AND RELEASE

The return rate for 2023 was again around 97% from the private beats. Slightly lower return rates are reported on the public water.

RESEARCH

The usual electro-fishing programme, including for the Forestry Commission on the Halladale was undertaken in 2023. As reported by the Manager the young stock in the River are in good health. New lighter equipment has been provided at no charge by Marine Scotland making the task easier. The National electro-fishing programme for Scotland ("NEPS") has had its funding withdrawn and the budget has been re-allocated to assist with the capital expenditure.

PREDATOR CONTROL

The Board obtained a licence to control sawbills which was been exercised. A renewal will be requested. It was noted that Gull numbers are increasing. It was noted that individual estates are free to seek a licence to control black back gulls.

HATCHERY

The hatchery programme for 2023 had to be abandoned due to a landslide fouling up the hatchery burn. 60 broodstock fish were returned to the river unharmed. A review of the design of the hatchery water intake is underway with a view to prevention of a repeat.

RIVER WORKS

No works have been undertaken since the repair at Jetty Stream. Major changes due to winter flooding appear evident, but it was agreed to monitor and review the need for any repair work. A local contractor is available to undertake any small scale repairs not requiring a CAR licence.

Concern was raised that the newly installed ford at the Kildonan Church may cause issues if the River rises too quickly and it was noted that a bridge may be required.

OPEN DAYS

These were well attended, but no fish were caught.

LADIES DAY

This is scheduled for 18 May when ladies only will be permitted to fish on the lower river.

FISHERY PROTECTION

No poaching events recorded in 2023.

FISH COUNTER

The Counter remains broken. Funding assistance has been sought but has not proved sufficient for estimate costs. It is hoped that the next round of funding will prove more successful.

FISH DISEASE

No serious threat from Saprolegnia in 2023, but a diseased fish has been seen in recent days. It is hoped that an increase in water temperature will help to remove any threat.

AOB

The condition of the path adjacent to the left bank at the tidal waters on the Lower river remains a concern. The path sits on land not owned by any of the river proprietors who have pledged to make a contribution of £1000 towards its repair when a plan is finalised. It was suggested the Community Council should draw up the plan.

NEXT MEETING

This will be held at 11.15 am on Saturday 10th May 2025 at Kildonan Hall, Helmsdale.