

MINUTES OF THE TENTH ANNUAL MEETING

Of

HELMSDALE DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD

**Held at Kildonan Hall, Helmsdale, Sutherland on Saturday 10th May,
2025 at 11.20 a.m.**

PRESENT

George Stephenson

Alexander Darwall

Lucy Kenyon as Mandatory for Badanloch Estate

Neil McCorquodale

Sir John Nutting K.C. B.t.

Fergus Wigan

John Young

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, Donald Sutherland

CHAIR

George Stephenson took the Chair.

APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Sir Algernon Heber Percy, Lady Wigan and William Jappy

MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

The Minute of the last public meeting held on 11 May 2024 was approved.

MATTERS ARISING

There were no matters arising.

ACCOUNTS

The Audited Accounts for the year to 31 December 2024 prepared by Saffery Champness, Chartered Accountants were tabled, considered and approved subject to their amendment on page 5 where they are to be signed by Neil McCorquodale.

REPORT FOR 2024

The Report for 2024 was tabled considered and approved. It was recommended that a record be kept of all sea trout catches.

CATCHES

Catches for the year to date have been low. Whilst March was reasonable April was poor with only 8 fish caught. Poor catches have continued into May with low water in River. Saproglegnia is evident in a number of fish.

FISH COUNTER

The Counter has been working well with no issues encountered to date. There are no verified figures available as the data requires verification by Marine Scotland. Smolts have been reported to be in excellent condition. The insect hatch has been good which it is felt will have aided the smolts.

FLOOD DAMAGE

Winter Spates have caused silting of various areas. A backwater has developed at 3 above. The Tussocks at 5 above are to be mulched to assist with access.

CONSERVATION GRADES

The River retains a Grade One classification.

CATCH AND RELEASE

The return rate for 2024 was again around 97% from the private beats. Proper protocols for the handling of fish have been encouraged and appear to be being adopted.

RESEARCH

The resumption of the genotyping of Helmsdale Fish in conjunction with UHI was noted. Peter Quail will liaise with the Ghillies to secure fin clip samples and records to assist with the project.

PREDATOR CONTROL

The Board obtained a licence to control sawbills which was been exercised. A renewal will be requested.

HATCHERY

The hatchery programme for 2024 allowed 160,000 unfed fry to be released into the river. Saprolegnia was observed in the fish in October and it was agreed in future to delay the catching of the broodstock to assist with disease management. A water re-circulation plant at the hatchery is to be considered as an option to mitigate disease. This would also allow fed on fry to be released. .

RIVER WORKS

No works requiring CAR from SEPA are anticipated. Erosion adjacent to the railway line has been observed. Network Rail continuously monitor the integrity of the track.

LADIES DAY

This is scheduled for a day in August when ladies only will be permitted to fish on the lower river.

FISHERY PROTECTION

No poaching events recorded in 2024.

FISH COUNTER

This item was covered above.

FISH DISEASE

This item was covered above.

NEXT MEETING

This will be held at 11.15 am on Saturday 16th May 2026 at Kildonan Hall, Helmsdale.