

# **MINUTES OF THE ELEVENTH ANNUAL MEETING**

Of

## **HELMSDALE DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD**

**Held at Kildonan Hall, Helmsdale, Sutherland on Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> May,  
2026 at 11.15 a.m.**

### **PRESENT**

George Stephenson

Alexander Darwall

Lucy Kenyon as Mandatory for Badanloch Estate

Neil McCorquodale

Sir John Nutting K.C. Bt.

Fergus Wigan

John Young

### **IN ATTENDANCE**

Sir Michael Wigan Bt. – Fishery Manager

Martin Mackay – Clerk

Peter Quail – Head Bailiff

Attendees – Mrs M Quail, Robert Henderson, John Macleod, Donald Sutherland and Brian Lyall.

### **CHAIR**

George Stephenson took the Chair.

### **APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from William Jappy.

## **MINUTES OF LAST MEETING**

The Minute of the last public meeting held on 15 May 2025 was approved.

## **MATTERS ARISING**

There were no matters arising.

## **ACCOUNTS**

The Audited Accounts for the year to 31 December 2025 prepared by Saffery Champness, Chartered Accountants were tabled, considered and approved.

## **REPORT FOR 2025**

The Report for 2025 was tabled, considered and approved.

## **CATCHES**

Catches for the year to date have seen an improvement from last year. 114 fish were caught until the end of April.

## **FLOOD DAMAGE**

There were no large floods over the winter and so only localised areas of movement are evident. The bank degradation at Craggie Bends/Jetty Stream was noted. Options will be considered.

## **CONSERVATION GRADES**

The River retains a Grade One classification.

## **CATCH AND RELEASE**

The return rate for 2025 was around 96% from the private beats. The Ghillies have agreed that photographs will only be taken with fish in the net.

## **RESEARCH**

No funding is currently available for research and so only limited electro-fishing was done. Although research funding is no longer available the Scottish Government have provided a thermal imaging drone.

## **PREDATOR CONTROL**

The Board obtained a licence to control sawbills which has been exercised. A renewal will be requested as will an extension for Cormorant control. Sawbill counts demonstrate that numbers are steady.

## **HATCHERY**

The hatchery programme for 2025 allowed 150,000 unfed fry to be released into the river. All fry were released in good condition before 15 April.

## **RIVER WORKS**

Baile an Or Bridge steps are to be widened. It is considered desirable to erect benches to provide seating for watching fishing and tick protection. The location of any benches will require to be agreed in consultation with Proprietors. Huts at 6 and 3 below are leaking and require attention. It was noted that the new hut was not available for the start of the season as paint could not be applied until the temperature had increased.

## **LADIES DAY**

This will be scheduled for later in the summer when ladies only will be permitted to fish on the lower river.

## **FISHERY PROTECTION**

No poaching events recorded in 2025. A seal scarer has been deployed in the harbour, but it remains to be seen whether it is effective.

## **FISH COUNTER**

The counter is working although data is not verified. It is nonetheless considered to be accurate with the figures obtained representing a minimum number. Fish Tek have proved very helpful in resolving any issues.

## **FISH DISEASE**

There are no signs of disease on the River this year, although the fish have often appeared sluggish which may indicate a sub-clinical disease issue.

## **OTHER BUSINESS**

In order to improve communication, it was agreed that the Bailiffs would attend the early year meeting of the Ghillies.

It was requested that consideration be given to the provision of Boats for beats 5 & 6.

The suggestion of a new bridge to the Big Rock was raised. After discussion it was felt that construction costs would be significant and outweigh likely benefit.

Works are ongoing to repair the Killearnan Bridge and the bridge below Kildonan Lodge.

It was agreed that signage will be prepared requiring dogs to be kept on leads or under close control. Wandering dogs pose a threat to both livestock and ground nesting birds. Ghillies will brief guests as to the position and the bye- laws will be amended to reflect this.

## **NEXT MEETING**

This will be held at 09.45 am on Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> May 2027 at Kildonan Hall, Helmsdale.