

RIVER CREE DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD

Minutes of the First Annual Public Meeting (preceded by a meeting of qualified proprietors) held at Bruce Hotel, Newton Stewart on Wednesday, 23rd October 2013 at 6pm

Board Members Attending:

Terence Flanagan – Chairman
Murdo Crosbie
John Galloway
George McShane
Jim Davidson
Jonathan Haley and
Dougal Evans
Duncan Baillie
Steve Smith - Mandatory for Lord Crampton

Also in Attendance:-

Peter Murray, Clerk
Billy McHarg, Treasurer
From Galloway Fisheries Trust – Jamie Ribbens, Rowan Armstrong and Jacqui Graham

Approximately 40 members of the public also attending.

Before the meeting copies of the Agenda, Accounts for the year to 31st March 2013 and the Annual Report were circulated to everyone.

Terence Flanagan then introduced himself as the new Chairman of the Board in succession to Jamie Hyslop for whom a vote of thanks was received. The Chairman then corrected two errors in a recent Galloway Gazette Report.

The Chairman then explained to the meeting how the meeting would go as it was the first meeting to be held under the auspices of the new Aquaculture and Fisheries (Scotland) Act 2013 . The first part of the meeting would be a meeting of all the qualified proprietors to consider the Annual Report and the Accounts as fit for presenting to the public meeting. Thereafter the Annual Public Meeting would be held to go over the Annual Report and the Accounts following which there would be a question and answer session dealing with written questions received, questions from the floor and then any other competent business.

The Chairman then introduced Billy McHarg as Treasurer and Peter Murray as Clerk and asked all the Board Members attending to introduce themselves.

The meeting of proprietors then took place and the Annual Report and the Accounts were considered and there being no proposed changes to the Report the Report was signed by the Chairman. With regard to the consideration of the Accounts the

Treasurer advised that proprietors would note a slight drop in the income and explained that this was principally due to the contracts entered into with netsman whereby certain netsman agreed not to fish for 5 years in return for which they received a payment from the Board equivalent to their levy therefor in practical terms reducing the levy to nil. Others obtained a discount for agreeing not to fish before the 1st of June.

A question was then taken from one of the proprietors of Newton Stewart Angling Association enquiring what number of proprietors had not paid and what steps were taken to recover unpaid levies. The Treasurer confirmed that notices were sent out in July and in October there were 9 outstanding. The Treasurer had just sent a reminder following the end of the Season . There were 2 smaller proprietors who were regular non-payers and the Board would have to consider whether to instruct Court action. There being no other questions on the Accounts these were also approved and that concluded the meeting of proprietors.

The Chairman then introduced the Annual Public Meeting and advised that the first matter was to consider the Annual Report and then the Accounts.

Newton Stewart Angling Association raised the point that the Report had nothing in it regarding the sea lice problem. The Chairman advised that this was a matter also raised in questions received by letter to the Clerk and would be dealt with under that heading. There being no further comments on the Annual Report and none on the Accounts as everybody had been present when these were considered by the proprietors, the Chairman moved the meeting on to dealing with the letters received by the Clerk.

The Clerk had received 5 letters and 1 e-mail all from anglers or Newton Stewart Angling Association. The principal letter was a letter dated 11th September 2013 from Newton Stewart Angling Association and at the Chairman's invitation the Secretary to the Association read the letter to the meeting.

The points raised by the letter and dealt with by the Chairman were as follows:-

1. Is the Board satisfied with the current state of the river or does it need things done to it. **Answer** – The Board certainly agree that things do need to be done and the Chairman hoped that the Board will address these. A Cree Management Plan had been drafted last year but had not yet been finalised and this sought to divide responsibility for these works and that hopefully should be adopted by the Board this year. One of the major programmes is to have an electro fishing survey of the whole of the catchment and the Galloway Fisheries Trust (GFT) have undertaken to carry out the survey over the whole river over a 5 year period . The Chairman hoped this period could be reduced.
2. Does the Board agree that they should employ an independent Biologist to survey the river. **Answer** – No. The Board cannot afford to employ another Biologist. They already fund the GFT and the River Cree Hatchery and Habitat Trust (RCHHT) who although assisted in funding by the Board are entirely separate from the Board. The way forward is to adopt the Management Plan.

3. Is the River Cree Hatchery and Habitat Trust a good idea. **Answer** – I am not in a position to comment as I am also a Trustee of that body.
4. Board Meetings. The Angling Association would like to see the Board having more regular meetings. **Answer** – At the moment the Board are meeting practically monthly but agreed that regular meetings at least 2 monthly would be advisable.
5. Lobbying. Does the Board agree that it should be lobbying the Scottish Government on sealice. **Answer** – possibly although there is a legal issue as to whether this is covered in the statutory remit of the Board for the increase and protection of salmon and the stocking of the waters. It is possible that it could be and if it is he would be happy to take it forward. It would however be for the Board to decide.
6. Can the various differences be put aside. **Answer** - Yes. There have obviously been difficulties in the past but the Chairman is committed to moving forward and was prepared to work with anybody who was prepared to work with him and the Board. The Board would do everything they could to ensure that the Management Plan was adopted and carried out successfully.

The Chairman then asked if any other members of the Board had a comment. Dougal Evans then commented on behalf of the Galloway Fisheries Trust and for whom he was a Trustee stating that, first of all, he was delighted to see the huge turnout for the meeting as this was in stark contrast to previous years. He pointed out that the amount of levy paid to the GFT was £9,200. Whilst members of the Angling Association may begrudge this it was a matter of fact that the GFT were able to multiply that by a factor of at least 10 as is evidenced by the current liming project in the head waters of the Cree. GFT because of their now acknowledged expertise were able to take on government bodies and quasi government bodies such as Forestry Commission, SEPA, SNH and Planning Authorities. The main hope for the river is that this influence, particularly with the Forestry Commission, will result in replanting regulations being much more fish friendly. Mention had been made of the results of GFT Survey's not being made available and he pointed out that these were always made available to the Board and it was for Board members who were representing others to report back to them and as far as he was aware the Newton Stewart Angling Association had always had at least one member on the Board. He agreed with the Chairman that the Board did not require to employ another independent Biologist as GFT had been carrying out this work for over 20 years and the results were still available. He agreed sea lice was a huge problem but felt the Board must keep their focus on the home beat and leave the sea lice problem to be dealt with by the Association of West Coast River Trusts.

Jamie Ribbens from GFT was then invited to speak and respond to the claim that GFT did not prioritise salmonids. He advised that they indeed do although they are interested in all species. In this day and age to obtain funding one had to have a broader appeal than simply trout and salmon. The interests of all species also help the salmon. Spring salmon were one of the species of fish covered in the Trust's recent rare fish project for which considerable funding had been obtained which would not otherwise have been available if it did not include non-salmonids. It also enabled the Trust to raise the funding for dealing with Japanese Knotweed carrying out fencing work, removing trees and general other works on the river.

The GFT run a website where there is loads of information to be obtained by anybody who wishes to look. He agreed that the management plan was the best way forward for the Board. Finally, he emphasised that the main problem for the whole catchment area was acidification and indeed this was the main reason why the GFT was founded in the first place. We were now finally seeing some positive results in the High Cree where salmon had completely died out in the 90s but there were now encouraging signs of recovery due mainly to the restructuring of forestry and liming in the area.

Concern was then raised from the floor regarding problems in obtaining consent from the Forestry Commission for capturing brood stock as last year this had come through too late. The Chairman advised that he was aware of the problem and had spoken to the Forestry Commission that day and was hoping to have access permission granted next week. Dougal Evans was asked to speak to Lord Granchester to see about access to the Glentool waters.

A further question from the floor enquired if the GFT was electro-fishing the whole river in the ensuing 5 years why was it only being done now. It was explained that the GFT had been doing this over a great number of years and information was always given to the Board. The Chairman advised that this led on to the next letter from an angler enquiring which burns were producing fry and par and which were not and whether the Board had any data to support this and if so why was it not routinely shared with riparian owners.

It was again explained by Dougal Evans that all this information was available. It was always given to the Board and it was up to Board members to report back to whoever they represented. The GFT have fought the Forestry Commission from day one and the process of planting and replanting was improving all the time. With regard to the question of liming and why it was not done before it was explained that originally the costs were horrendous and ongoing whereas the current experiment was a fixed one off cost of £80,000. Furthermore, SEPA had a policy generally against liming but they had agreed to this particular experiment going ahead.

The question of lobbying parliament again raised its head and it was stated from the floor that the only way to lobby effectively was to lobby your own local MP and get him or her on board.

The Angling Association agreed that their letter had been dealt with but they had 11 points arising out of a subsequent petition which they would not wish dealt with at this meeting but a note of which was handed to the Clerk for further consideration by the Board.

Another angler's letter was then read to the meeting but it related to the details of information etc discussed above. As a result of this it was agreed that the Board would have to consider whether it was able to set up its own dedicated website to deal with distribution of information. It was noted that GFT may in future try and produce their electro-fishing survey results in a map based form.

A question was then raised from the floor as to who set the levels for the stocking programme. The Chairman explained that the GFT produced suggested proposals which had been considered by a sub-committee consisting of himself, Murdo Crosbie and Jamie Ribbens who finalised the figures before going to the riparian owners seeking permission.

A question from the floor was then put to Jamie Ribbens as to how he saw the future and what could we do now? His reply was that acidification was still the main problem but there were better signs of recovery at present than at any other time in the past. Also the whole question of marine survival was important. The GFT supported the hatchery but advised that it should only take out surplus stock and he agreed that continual habitat work was important.

An e-mailed letter from an angler related to historical detail on which the Chairman felt he was not able to comment and asked if any other Board members of longer standing would do so. The e-mail was again complaining at not getting information in the past and came from a member of the Angling Association. It was explained on behalf of the Board again that the information was given to the Board and the Angling Association were represented on the Board and accordingly they should speak to their representatives. The Board member Dougal Evans then offered, in his capacity as Chairman of GFT, to attend along with Jamie Ribbens and other members of GFT at Newton Stewart Angling Associations Annual General Meeting to give a talk and slideshow on the works of the Trust. The Secretary confirmed that it would be considered by the Association at their November meeting.

The Chairman then dealt with the cancellation of the original date for the Annual General Public Meeting explaining that he like many others attending tonight had been absolutely furious but whilst he did not accept the reasons given for the original cancellation he believed that the meeting could not have gone ahead because there would be no Annual Report available.

Any other competent matter and any further questions from the floor. A suggestion came from the floor that the Board could consider improving the river by carrying out work on spawning gravels either by adding gravel or by loosening gravel which was already there but had become compacted. It was agreed that this would be considered by the Board and indeed was already proposed for part of the Challoch Burn.

A discussion then took place on the question of tagging and it was agreed that this would be discussed at a Board meeting.

Finally, reverting to the question of lobbying the Board was urged to contact the Association of Salmon Fishery Boards and put pressure on them to do the lobbying.

One of the long standing proprietors on the river Brian Low then intimated that he understood that the Clerk was giving up his position as Clerk to the Board at the end of this year and thanked him for all his work on behalf of the Board over many years in which the meeting joined.

At 8pm a vote of thanks was given to the Chairman for the way he had conducted a potentially difficult meeting and the meeting was called to a close.