

MIGRATORY FISH COMMITTEE

Minutes of meeting on Sunday, 1 December 2019 at 10.30am, Green Hotel, Kinross

1 PRESENT:- Messrs Balfour, Campbell, McKay, McLennan, Picken, Pirie and Walker.

2 CHAIRMAN:-CC welcomed members and commented on their journeying in the prevailing temperature.

3 APOLOGIES:- Messrs Stephen and Wight.

4 CONFLICTS OF INTEREST:- None were declared.

5 MINUTES OF MEETING OF 29 September 2019:- Their adoption was agreed by those present

6 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE ABOVE MINUTES:- These will arise under agenda items.

7 SANA BOARD AND FUTURE MEETINGS OF THE MFC

OMcL has surpassed expectations in the amount that he has got agreement on as a donation to fund MFC meetings. The SANA Board agreed the arrangement. OMcL, when asked what announcement of our benefactor was required, said that the organisation wished to have no public acknowledgement. For clarity, the donation is from a commercial organisation whose activities do not cause any conflict of interest and which does not seek to influence the content of the committee's policy work. OMcL was thanked for sourcing the donation and would provide contact details to the chairman so that he can write a letter of appreciation.

8 CROWN ESTATE SCOTLAND

Responses to the consultations, on the Draft 2020-2023 Corporate Plan and on the Strategic Management Plan, were submitted before the closing date of 22 November after members and the NMFC had confirmed them.

At the last stakeholder meeting CC made a few harsh comments on the salmon farming sector. This provoked quite a reaction from the attending MS representative who has a responsibility in the aquaculture sector.

9 SNH GENERAL LICENCES

Since our submission to SNH on general licences for controlling piscivorous birds the issue in relation to these birds on the Tweed has been aired in 'The Times'.

Last Friday preliminary results of the Moray Firth smolt tracking project during 2019 were released. Seven rivers from the Deveron round to the Conon participated and 850 smolts were tagged and tracked. On average 50% of the tagged smolts failed to reach the sea and a further 15% went missing in coastal waters. A warning is given that it is premature to jump to the conclusion that in river predation is the reason for the missing 50% or that 50% of untagged smolts suffer equal in river losses. Largely at the instigation of the farming community SNH is seeking views for changes to the sections in the Access Code dealing with taking access to the countryside with dogs. Comment is sought by 6 December. Incidents of dogs worrying livestock and disturbing nesting birds are perceived to be on the increase. All agreed that the problem is irresponsible dog owners who are relaxed about allowing their animals to run freely off lead. Indeed many dog owners go into the countryside with that in mind. Examples of irresponsible dog owners allowing dogs to seriously inconvenience anglers were recounted. CC had circulated a draft response which would now be sent to A Ayre, SANA's corresponding member of the Access Forum, for inclusion of input from the NMFC and then onwards to SNH.

10 WILD FISHERIES REFORM AND RELATED MATTERS

CC has been copying Dr Antje Branding, Simon Dryden's successor, into our recent submissions to consultations. He feels that meeting her would be beneficial. J Twaddle, D Ogg and R Wood are likeminded. CC will push this forward.

The £400K national electro fishing program ran this year for the second time. JP accompanied the efishing team to a few of the Ythan sites. The amount of data collected over the country will be immense.

11 CONCERNING SALMON FARMING IN SCOTLAND

A SEPA consultation closes on 17 January. It concerns the use of biomass or feed to regulate the organic output from marine pen fish farming to the environment. The MFC did not respond to this consultation since members do not have the necessary technical expertise to respond authoritatively.

Since the September MFC meeting a number of 'attacks' on, in particular, open sea cage on-growing of salmon have emerged. The MFC did not associate itself with the unrealistic initiatives. One issue floated is the impact on salmon of industrial fishing for species going into salmon feeds. In the ocean areas where European atlantic salmon may be found these fisheries developed post the early 1970s, fluctuate considerably on an annual basis and are now controlled by TACs.

Recently two twenty ton loads of farmed salmon, one of morts the other of gutted fish have spilled, one on the A86 the other on the A82. The latter load was reported to have then vanished.

The total number of morts annually in sea cages in Scotland is such that were a comparable death rate taking place in farm animals action would not be long delayed.

From various sources £13.5M has been sourced for investment in the Scottish Aquaculture Innovation Centre. The centre will host a Gill Health Initiative in 2020.

12 NASCO

Direct and indirect member countries are expected to have lodged their reports on all aspects of salmon in their jurisdictions by the end of November. If not thereby updated their existing reports will remain. It seems that many may not have been

updated.

The 2020 annual meeting will take place in June in Torshavn, Faroe Isles. Funding a delegate is problematic. The matter will be raised at SANA board and a means of seeking donations will be looked for.

13 CONSERVATION REGULATIONS

As noted in the September minutes the overall average grade increased a little for 2020. This is to be expected given the inclusion of the very low catch figures for 2018 in the assessments.

14 CATCHES

Members observed that during the latter part of the 2019 season angling conditions were often favourable but productive angling was not encountered throughout the country. Some rivers or parts of rivers were actually quite disappointing. Also continuing, if not actually increasing, was the number of untaken rods on one time fully let beats. Now that fish can run into rivers without encountering the hazard of commercial nets this fall off in demand relates to the low numbers and changes in run timing of salmon in Scotland.

The bulletin of salmon and sea trout catches in England and Wales for 2018 is late in being published. Although the North East of England net catch of salmon during 2018, between nine and ten thousand, is known from a report to NASCO the corresponding sea trout catch remains undisclosed. 2019 is the first year without directed salmon fishing in this net fishery. It has been reported that T net trials designed to trap sea trout but not salmon ran for eleven weeks from June to August using five nets. The catch was 3,355 sea trout and 40 salmon. One may expect it to be a year before we hear the catch from the whole fishery during their 2019 season.

15 FISHERY MANAGEMENT SCOTLAND

JP attended the FMS AGM on 30 October. For most of those present it was the first opportunity to hear Dr A Branding explaining how she anticipated the government progressing salmon related issues.

16 NMFC MINUTES

Those of the nearest past meeting on 30 September had been circulated. The amalgamation of the NMFC and the MFC had been raised. Several ongoing matters are of interest to both committees and co-operation on these has not been problematic. It was agreed that combining the two committees was not sensible given both the length of agendas or number of meetings which would result. Perhaps one joint meeting a year, if sufficient common issues were currently active, might be arranged.

17 SANA LTD BOARD

With D Ogg in the chair of Angling Scotland Ltd it is interacting quite well with SANA Ltd. The loss of funding from Sportscotland, combined with a declining membership, will impact on what can be funded. It will be two years before SANA can seek renewed funding from Sportscotland.

An administrator for ASL was appointed in early November. At the moment Andrew McIntosh is keeping the administration function on the rails.

The SANA Ltd AGM will take place on 23 February 2020 in the King Robert Hotel near Stirling.

18 AOCB

AW was intrigued to encounter sea trout on the menu on two occasions. Close inspection pointed to them most likely being rainbow trout which had presumably been in sea water hence the 'sea'.

The press has reported a heavy investment in salmon enhancement in Iceland by the billionaire founder of INEOS. It may be that he has also donated to the AST.

OMcL pointed out that in its promotional activities Visit Scotland makes no mention of angling. This contrasts with the former Scottish Tourist Board which annually published a comprehensive booklet of angling opportunities.

OMcL suggested that the MFC might meet for an angling outing. A possible venue was mentioned.

19 DATE OF NEXT MFC MEETING

The next MFC meeting will be on 8 March at 10.30am in Kinross.

The SANA Ltd AGM will be held on 23 February.

The meeting closed at 1.15pm with a vote of thanks to the chairman.