MIGRATORY FISH COMMITTEE

J Pirie	Sec	Aberdeenshire	2018	4	4	*
A Walker	V Ch	Pitlochry	2018	4	4	*
W Balfour		Brechin	2019	3+1A	4	
W Duncan		Perth	2019	0+4A	4	**
O McLennan		Fortrose	2019	3+1A	4	
J Stephen		Aberdeen	2019	0+4A	4	
R C Campbell	Ch	Edinburgh	2020	3+1A	4	
R Picken		Irvine	2020	4	4	
F Wight		Hawick	2020	4	4	

Above, for each member, are shown the number of meetings attended and the number which could have been attended from December 2016 to October 2017. Apologies tendered are also shown. Members who stand down from the committee at the 2018 AGM are marked with an * and are eligible for re-election. Re. **, W Duncan from Perth and District AC was replaced by J McKay, also representing P&D AC, with effect from 4th October.

The number of committee members is below the eighteen allowed for. Although the present membership is reasonably spread over the country and several members also take an interest in rivers some distance from their homes, new members would be most welcome, especially ladies and younger members. The Committee is dominated by retired gentlemen who have the advantage of experience but lack the perspective of other groups.

In contrast to its early years in the late 1980s much committee work is now accomplished by e-mail and attached documents. Thus, members can often make essential contributions to committee work, even if unable to attend all meetings. The committee normally meets four times a year in Kinross, one of these meetings often being held on the same day as the SANA Ltd AGM.

Preparation for New Freshwater Fisheries Legislation

In a dramatic turn of events in February 2017, the responsible Minister, Roseanna Cunningham, put paid to the threat of a rod licence and announced other decisions which blew the intended system of all species freshwater fisheries management out of the water.

The MFC had already suspected that politicians might pull back from the full blooded Wild Fisheries Reform (WFR), fearing negative political impact. We had been careful to make that point in our representations to the Scottish Government. Indeed, SANA was the only angling body represented on the Stakeholder Group which welcomed the decision to abandon any form of direct charge on anglers.

However, the WFR is still being pursued, to an extended timetable and a very much amended remit. What we are looking at now is a revised role for the newly combined efforts of fishery boards and fishery trusts (Fishery Management Scotland) and other new terms of reference.

In summary:

WFR will not involve

- Rod licences or any form of angler levy.
- Criminalisation of fishing without permission for non-migratory fish. It will continue in Protection Order areas, as now.
- Central Government funding of the mainstream of fishery management.
- Fishery Management Organisations, i.e. Boards will remain and may not be present everywhere. Management obligations for non-migratory fish for Boards, but the subject may remain in the National Strategy. (See below)

WFR will involve

- National Strategy. The Working Group to be reconvened for redrafting. SANA will be involved.
- Central National Management Unit for direction of science and research.
- Fewer, bigger, Boards will be encouraged and it appears that they may include Trusts but not necessarily.
- Fishery Management Plans, central and local, dovetailing with conservation plans.
- Net fisheries to be subject of oversight by District Boards, and members of same.
- Retention of Protection Orders, possibly improved.
- Partnership and engagement.

WFR may involve

- Angling development viz. promotion and youth recruitment but not as an obligation in the Bill. The "Angling For All" programme is dead.
- Conservation of non-migratory species – with discussions to be held on possible references in the Bill. This may include direction/commissioning of Board responsibilities for brown trout where they are a population which has members that are sea going.
- Single data source for salmon and sea trout catch statistics.

See SANA website for submissions on this subject and updates on the WFR at: http://www.gov.scot/Topics/marine/Salmon-Trout-Coarse/fishreform.

Crown Estate Devolution

SANA has participated in the process which has established an interim management body for Crown Estate Scotland (CES) and will lead to further legislation that will define how the devolved properties will be managed.

There are multiple levels of this subject that can affect anglers, for good or ill.

Firstly, CES owns many migratory fishing rights and it is the default owner for inland fishing rights that are not otherwise used. Many of these current rights, about half, are leased to angling clubs. Their security of tenure is an issue, as is how much they have to pay for what can be reasonably interpreted as provision of fishing opportunities for the general public, i.e. management for public benefit.

Secondly, CES is probably the principal owner of netting rights for migratory fish in Scotland. While the bulk of these are not currently let, and those involving coastal fixed engines are prohibited from operating (for the time being), there is the potential nightmare situation where net and coble and/or fixed engine fish rights could be leased to new operators or even sold to new owners. SANA, understandably, opposes both.

Thirdly, CES owns non-migratory fishing rights. SANA has called for individual recognition of these and consideration given to long term management options whereby access for angling is widely available to the public, e.g. through leases to angling clubs, and where necessary, encouraging creation of clubs where these do not presently exist.

Fourthly, and not the least of our concerns, CES is the monopoly owner of offshore sites that are leased for salmon farming. In the Stakeholder Advisory Group for this subject, SANA has taken the initiative and presented a paper, advocating relocation of existing farms to more suitable sites and support for new/replacement capacity in closed containment systems.

Where fish are caged and how farms should be regulated in future is under investigation as a Scottish Aquaculture Research Forum (SARF) research project, SARF113. See http://www.sarf.org.uk/.

Closed containment now looks like having a good chance of being implemented. There are two developments. CES and Marine Scotland are to commission research to assess "split cycle containment". In essence, the idea is that for a critical part of sea rearing with respect to the build-up of sea lice numbers, fish will be in closed containment. This could be at sea, with membrane or steel tank enclosure, or on land*. Open sea cages would only be used for about 10 months of the production cycle and there would be 8 weeks fallowing of those sites every year.

*A CEFAS model for a recirculating land-based closed containment system is also being considered. Again, this would be a split cycle system with fish being finished at sea.

The second development has come from the industry itself. Marine Harvest has been developing an offshore "egg" containment system and this has been approved for use in Norway. Ref: https://www.fishupdate.com/go-ahead-for-marine-harvest-egg/. Steve Bracken of Marine Harvest Scotland has indicated their interest in using the technology here. Ref: https://www.pressandjournal.co.uk/fp/business/north-of-scotland/1258836/eggs-could-replace-pens-at-scotlands-fish-farms/. This looks like closed containment over the whole finishing cycle.

See SANA website for submissions on this subject.

North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organisation (NASCO)

SANA was not represented at the 34th Annual Meeting of NASCO held in Sweden in June 2017, but participated in NGO discussions prior to the meeting. The full Report from the meeting is available on the internet (www. nasco.int). NASCO Headquarters continue to be based in Edinburgh. Dr Peter Hutchinson retired as Secretary and was replaced by Dr Emma Hatfield. We sent our best wishes to Peter for his retirement, acknowledging his considerable efforts for NASCO on behalf of wild Atlantic salmon and very helpful advice given to SANA (Migratory Fish Committee) over the years.

Main news items from the meeting, described in detail in the Report:-

- NASCO's Research Board receives about 540,000 euros grant from the European Commission to support telemetry studies on marine mortality of wild salmon and development of a sea lice model.

- Board endorses new salmon Tracking Programme (Salsea-Track).

- NASCO and North Pacific Anadromous Fish Commission to organise International Year of the Salmon in 2018/19.

- Measures announced for the 2017 Greenland salmon fishery. These include no export of salmon or its products from Greenland and a quota of 45 tonnes from all professional and non-professional fishermen

Reports are included on: management of single and mixed stock fisheries, especially on stocks below their conservation limit; impacts of hydropower; impacts of salmon farming; hatchery and stocking activities; research inventory of salmon at sea; annual performance reviews from the member jurisdictions; interactive map based on NASCO salmon rivers database (2,503 rivers to date).

Pink Salmon (*Oncorhynchus gorbuscha)*

Many instances have been reported of pink salmon, a species native to the Pacific Ocean, entering Scottish rivers in 2017. SANA has asked Marine Scotland to get these fish classified as "invasive non-native" and has requested that every reasonable effort be made to prevent their continued presence.

At first sight, a new supply of fish might appear to be an attractive proposition. However, closer examination of the issues involved shows that they present a threat.

Many of these fish appear to have spawned successfully. Investigations are underway, under laboratory conditions and in the wild, to determine whether hatching can be successful here. However, we do know that they have established themselves in parts of Norway and western Russia. Offspring go to sea relatively quickly by comparison to atlantic salmon but they do spend some time in freshwater. We don't know whether this period of early development would have a significant effect on food availability for native fish but we should, perhaps, assume a worst case scenario. Also, the possibility of biosecurity threats must be considered. These arise from live fish and their decaying carcases as potential carriers of diseases and parasites which could damage the health status of native salmonids and other

species. Therefore, it is a conservation issue for our trout and salmon that pink salmon should be eradicated to the furthest extent that is practicable.

Another issue arising is the possibility that anglers, or netsmen, might use the pretext of pink salmon being present to fish without written permission or without right of ownership of fishings. Because pink salmon are not recognised in Scottish law, that pretext could represent a new pressure on all fish stocks and a threat to the viability of angling clubs.

SANA is on the case, with collaboration between the Migratory and Non Migratory Fish Committees.

River Grades for 2018

In September 2017, Marine Scotland published their proposed grades for rivers during 2018. This is the third iteration of the process. Responses to the proposals were sought by 13 October. Over one hundred and fifty were received. Marine Scotland is open to changing a grade if deficiencies in the input data for a river are identified.

The process for arriving at a grade for a river has become more elaborate each year. This has involved introducing additional parameters in the calculation which leads to the probability which determines the grade of a river. Not everybody is convinced that all of these additional refinements are entirely valid.

Additionally, the assessments rely heavily on reported rod and line catches of salmon and grilse. These in turn rely on the veracity of anglers and proprietors but also depend on the extent to which anglers are on the river. For many years, catch returns to the government from net fisheries have included quite detailed information on fishing effort. Corresponding information was not sought alongside rod and line catch returns. Limited information is now being asked for. Expansion of this requirement may well be introduced. The MFC has highlighted the inclusion of a measure of angling effort in the calculation of river grades as a priority.

Salmon Catches

The past three years have produced disappointing rod and line catches of salmon and grilse compared to relatively recent years. While these catches of immediate past years are comparable to quite a few years in the 1950s and 1960s, the net fishery back then, in one year, took ten times as many fish as the angling fishery. At present the net fishery is absent apart from a small remnant of net and coble in river fishing – see the paper on netting impact on the MFC page of the SANA website. Thus, the present angling returns are below expectations.

Older anglers amongst us started angling at a time when early season fish were in the ascendancy. We saw numbers of these fish fall away but grilse numbers greatly increased and included weighty late running ones. These grilse numbers have now fallen away, particularly for the late running ones, and numbers of late running salmon have also declined.

Historical records show that such changes are a feature of recent centuries. Therefore, there is no need to be unduly pessimistic about the future. In fact, in the absence of netting and given

that this is extended, anglers, barring droughts, should be in a position to take advantage of improving runs of fish at whatever time of year they occur.

Sea Trout Complexities

Similar disappointment is felt about sea trout rod and line catches in recent years in most Scottish rivers and associated lochs, compared with historic levels. As with salmon catches, this is happening despite the long decline in coastal and river commercial salmon netting. Sea trout catch statistics also are heavily dependent on reporting veracity and accuracy. However, there are added complexities, compared to salmon.

As is now well-known, sea trout are the sea-running form of brown trout, readily distinguishable in the sea and soon after river entry, but darkening with maturity in freshwater. Often it is difficult to tell them apart without scale readings and, doubtless in some rivers, some anglers took advantage of this fact!

'Finnock' are a further source of angst when we review sea trout catch statistics. Records from individual beats often indicate increased size limits over time, probably brought in for conservation reasons. The statutory Scottish reported sea trout catch statistics now include a separate 'finnock' category. However, this does not solve the historical problem for annual comparisons.

Does all this matter? Well, yes it does. Fluctuations in annual catches, prone to variable weather conditions and no doubt affected also by reducing trends in angling effort, remain our main 'measurement' of sea trout stock abundance. New biological indicator methods being trialled on Tweed and Deveron, may allow relative densities of sea trout fry in indicator sites to be mapped from year to year and point the way forward. But funding is likely to remain a serious constraint.

Craig Campbell
23/11/17