

SANA LTD - MIGRATORY FISH COMMITTEE
Minutes of meeting on Sunday, 4 December 2016, at 10.30am, Green Hotel, Kinross

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

2 APOLOGIES:- Messrs Campbell, Duncan and Stephen.

3 VICE CHAIRMAN:- AW explained the indisposition of the chairman due to his bowing to a higher authority on the distaff side. CC had provided comprehensive notes on several agenda items.

4 CONFLICTS OF INTEREST:- There were no ongoing or new conflicts of interest.

5 MINUTES OF MEETING OF 25 SEPTEMBER 2016:- These were adopted nem con.

6 MATTERS ARISING FROM MINUTES OF 25 SEPTEMBER:- covered under following headings.

7 WILD FISHERIES REFORM

Since the September MFC meeting several sets of minutes of meetings of the Stakeholders Reference Group and of its technical working groups have been posted on the WFR website pages. Also circulated had been notes from CC and a number of documents pertaining to WFR which had come to hand.

Members noted the details of the staff changes at MS. Unsurprisingly the scheduled November SRG meeting had been postponed and the group will next meet on 14 December.

Published minutes indicate that the key issue of the financing of FMOs will be included in the remit of the Change Management and Transition Working Group. This explains why OMcL has had no call to a meeting of a Finance Working Group. To cope with its expanded remit the Change etc group will have its membership widened. Those present hoped that OMcL would soon be part of that widened membership.

Some of those present feared that the aspirations of WFR were out of reach and much of WFR might quietly be allowed to slip from sight. Another view was that out there were potential pilot FMOs itching to get the nod.

It was noted that the CEO and the director of communications and administration of FMS, see item 12, had already visited the incoming WFR team at MS.

Will maintaining the initial momentum of WFR depend primarily on ministerial push or on pressure from stakeholders?

8 CONSERVATION REGULATIONS

As with WFR there are many documents on the scotgov website both directly on the basis of the conservation measures and as minutes of several groups considering both general and specific inputs to the process of calculating the grade of a river.

Following the consultation after the release in early September of river grades for 2017 a small number of grades were changed. In some areas of the country there is disquiet with the assessed grades. When these are grade 3 the resulting disincentive for some anglers to fish may, via reduced catches, push the rivers further into that grade. A solution to the 'waste' problem of casualties in grade 3 rivers remains elusive.

JP pointed out the difference between a conservation limit as defined by ICES for Atlantic salmon stocks and what is being used in Scotland to establish grades. Scotland's approach is sensible and makes best use of the available information.

With the absence of fish counters on most rivers uncertainty and unconvinced anglers will remain.

There was no information on the take up of the £100K available to angling clubs via Fishpal to compensate for loss of income if anglers no longer patronise grade 3 fishings. One club's engagement in the process went nowhere.

The Crown Estate has reduced by 50% rents paid by angling clubs for fishings on grade 3 rivers.

The compensation paid to fixed engine operators during 2016 was not known. Since this will have come from public funds there may be a right to be told. This should be pursued. One member may find out about a small operation.

9 CROWN ESTATE STAKEHOLDER GROUP

CC reported that there has been no stakeholder discussion so far that is of direct relevance to angling. However the opportunity was taken at a policy workshop session to raise the question of access to fishings. Specifically we have requested identification of riparian fishing rights held by the Crown Estate – both game and coarse. The wider game being played out is the potential for further devolution within Scotland. On the one hand Crown Estate properties produce income which may attract local authorities, for example, as an additional income stream. On the other hand these properties carry considerable risks and obligations which may be impractical to cover if the estate is split. For example coastal properties are exposed to both man-made and natural disasters and many properties, especially agricultural, require maintenance by the landlord.

As in our submission the essential angling related issues are 1) compensation for the impact on wild fish stocks of Crown Estate leases to fin fish aquaculture and 2) access to angling opportunities and the financial return to the Crown Estate from fishing rights that are managed in the public interest. Additionally we should be concerned about the Crown Estate's position as probably the principal owner in Scotland of coastal netting rights for migratory fish. Few of these are currently let. Any disposals to the private sector, whether by lease or sale, combined with a relaxation or non continuation of the present three year ban on netting in coastal waters would allow a return of mixed stock coastal salmon fishing.

10 ACCESS TO WATER BY RAFTERS

Having heard an update on how issues have developed on the Tay, it was thought best to simply continue to keep a watching brief on the situation.

11 NASCO:- Nothing significant to report.

12 ASFB & RAFTS

Both of the above held AGMs on 17 November. Compared to the EGMs of 14 September all went as the agendas anticipated. ASFB is no more. In its place is Fisheries Management Scotland. Members of FMS are the erstwhile DSFB members of ASFB and similarly of RAFTS. It is anticipated that DSFBs will continue their memberships of FMS and early next year individual trusts will decide on their continuing as a member of FMS. A board of FMS will be elected within the next few months. Alan Wells has returned from his secondment at the WFR team as CEO of FMS and Brian Davidson is director of communications and administration. It will take some time to wind up RAFTS but all is in place for the process. The constitution of FMS has been designed to allow changes to cope with the anticipated introduction of FMOs and the demise of DSFBs. The ambitions for FMS are clear.

13 ESKS AND YTHAN

All reported quiet on the Esk. The N&C fishery was believed to have had an exceptionally poor season. As for the Ythan, a revised designated seal haul out area has been put out for consultation. It is confined to the North shore of the lowest part of the estuary and is a reasonable compromise between opposing views. There was no reintroduction of lower estuary N&C fishing.

14 THE 2016 SEASON

Members related their own experiences. There were some rewarding ones particularly up North. A feature of the season, apparently throughout the UK, was the lack of late running grilse or salmon. Inbound numbers of fish seemed to build up until July then fall away. Thus much of the most productive angling was not at the times which have been expected in recent years. A common theme was also that there seemed to be good numbers of fish present towards the season's end but well coloured and unresponsive. On the Tweed this led to untenanted time on some beats. Fish counters show big blips in monthly figures for individual years but the past three or so years may be an indicator of a shift to a changed pattern of numbers, sea ages and run timings. The wealth of monthly data released by MSS this year is helpful in confirming these features in salmon runs.

On the sea trout front there were encouraging reports of good numbers in places in the North. Also reports of numerous late season finnock in places on the East Coast. Will this carry over to sea trout numbers next year?

Neither directly nor via their website has the NE of England net catch of sea trout during 2015 been obtained from the EA.

15 NMFC MINUTES

Two of these have been circulated since our September meeting. An issue, also noted in the minutes of the SANA Ltd Board, is whether the NMFC and the MFC committees should combine. Those present were clear that they did not support any changes. Any committee member with interests in the other can seek membership as both committees are well below their full complements.

16 SANA LTD

The Board minutes were noted, particularly the ongoing moves towards Angling Scotland Ltd. This umbrella body for game, coarse and sea angling being promoted by Sportscotland will likely be on the agenda at the SANA Ltd AGM on 26 February. Whether SANACC Ltd will be brought into Angling Scotland Ltd was not known.

CC's invaluable input on many fronts was noted and all looked forward to it continuing from the position of chairman.

17 A O C B

Complaints to the EU court concerning sea lice in salmon rearing sea cages and concerning mixed stock coastal netting have not progressed but did the latter play a part in the present three year moratorium on coastal netting as one body has claimed?

On the Conon, soon after a seal culling licence was withdrawn seals appeared.

On the relatively small South Esk a seal went way up into the headwaters.

Beavers are now protected in Scotland but with management measures available where necessary.

Numerous other experiences and matters were shared.

18 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was agreed to hold the next meeting later than the SANA AGM on 26 February. The next MFC meeting was set for 10.30am on Sunday 12 March in Kinross.

The meeting concluded at 1.30pm.