

MIGRATORY FISH COMMITTEE
Minutes of meeting on Sunday, 6 December 2020, at 10.30am on Zoom

Present:- Messrs Campbell, McKay, Picken, Pirie, Walker and Wight.

1 CHAIRMAN

CC welcomed members and Jim Twaddle to the committee's third online meeting. Jim Twaddle (Chairman of the NMFC) was unseen and unheard but reported that we had raised two subjects on which he would comment by email.

2 APOLOGIES:- Bill Balfour and Antje Branding.

3 CONFLICTS OF INTEREST:- There were none.

4 MINUTES OF 27 SEPTEMBER 2020:- These were agreed.

5(i) SEPA consultation on updating environmental standards for the water environment.

A draft response had been circulated and was agreed subject to modification of the response to question 9. This now reads:-

Q9. Do you agree with the proposal in Section 11 to update the invasive non-native species list?

Yes. However, we find the proposal to be incomplete. Pink salmon (*Oncorhynchus gorbuscha*) and emerging/potential crustacean imports, e.g. killer shrimps (*Dikerogammarus villosus*), should be added to the list.

5(ii) Follow-up on SEPA RBMP key issues consultation.

A note had been circulated on a phone meeting with SEPA's Dr Ann Griffen on 9th October. More recently she had supplied the Digest Report from the consultation exercise. We were pleased to note that the subjects which SANA had raised had been included in the report. The next stage in the exercise would be the issue of the RBMP report. This will be the subject of formal consultation over an extended period.

5(iii) Regulation of the finfish aquaculture sector.

At the second meeting of the Wild Salmon Strategy Advisory Group (WSSAG) (see below), under the heading of pressures on wild salmon populations, CC had drawn attention to the introgression problem arising from fish farm escapees entering river systems. Specifically, triploidy should be required of fish farm stock. He also identified closed containment as a possible solution (if not carried out in sea cages) and had called for a report to the WSSAG on the MS/CES funded trial of partial containment.

5(iv) Avian Predators of wild salmon and trout.

CC had written a holding letter to the Cabinet Secretary, pending receipt of MS's research report.

5(v)(a) Wild Salmon Strategy Advisory Group.

CC reported that he had been invited by MS to join the advisory group and this had been approved by the SANA President. Its second meeting, the first after the invitation to CC, had been on 4th December.

CC reported that he had been very impressed with the process which looks like it will lead to a map based recording scheme for both stock recovery targets and the measures to be employed. In his view, this is a proper corporate planning style of approach because it will set measurable targets and review/assess the actions being employed.

CC posed the question - "What would success look like?". The answer to this question is fundamental to setting targets and will be a focus of attention at the next meeting on 16th December. In discussion, members moved to a position of advocating abundant stock levels, i.e. above the stock level which currently brings a river into category one. A harvestable surplus should be targeted. This led to consideration of how such a surplus should be divided between net fisheries and rod and line. Without getting to a definitive position on that topic, it was acknowledged that the ownership rights of all current fisheries must be respected.

The WSSAG is addressing exclusively salmon viz *salmo salar* only.

5(v)(b) Consultation on Salmon Stocking.

CC announced that a formal consultation on salmon stocking would follow from a preliminary meeting with MS on 14 December. Members were asked to let CC have their views as soon as possible.

As a preliminary position, CC had personally advocated that the current Scottish Government policy should be relaxed to allow the permitting of conservation stocking, i.e. to allow stocking from other rivers where the "native" stock is severely depleted. His note on the subject would be circulated.

6 NASCO

NASCO had called, at short notice, for NGO comments on the Scottish Government's Implementation Plan. This year's I P was quite good. Andy had collated comments from CC and JP. These would be circulated.

7 Catches during 2020

The speedy publication of 2020 catch figures for a few Scottish rivers shows catches higher than the corresponding 2019 ones despite periods of low water and reduced angling at times due to Covid. The bulk of the fish arrived from late spring to early autumn. Anglers reported good numbers of fish showing in late season but not readily caught. Some rivers did not see these numbers of fish. How the sea trout season can be classed remains to be seen.

8 Catch figures released by MS

Further to the position reported at the September meeting, enquiries revealed that Freedom of Information requests have resulted in additional detail of 2019 catches being released. Figures for 83 of the 109 SFD figures are now available leaving 26 not separately released.

Other Freedom of Information requests asked for details of the catches used in calculating categories for the 173 assessment areas. These requests pointed out that in calculating categories for 2021 the determining catches were not always shown. The resultant release of figures for years 2017 to 2019 was for 97 of the 173 assessment areas. This included data for rivers which up till now were combined within a SFD and included the sea trout figures. An anomaly remains that 2019 salmon catches in some of the 26 SFDs which are grouped in the SFD listings are displayed in their individual category assessments for 2019.

The above situation has arisen dependent on which box the signatory of a catch return form ticks regarding their legal status when he/she reports the data.

9 AOCB

Prompted by RP, there was discussion of reports of rivers being stocked with triploid brown trout. It was agreed that these fish represented another predation pressure on native brown trout (including stock which contribute to the sea trout population) and on salmon. It was agreed that CC should raise the subject with AB.

10 Next MFC meeting – set for 14 March – probably on Zoom.