

## NMFC Report for 2022 AGM

Members	Home Area
A Ayre (V/Chair & sec)	Falkirk
J Campbell	Glasgow
A McAlpine	Falkirk
J Mathew	Wishaw
K Mackie	Carluke
D Manion	Linlithgow
J Twaddle (Chairman)	Cumbernauld

The Non-Migratory Fish Committee held no face to face meetings in 2021 mainly because of the Covid pandemic, but also because the secretary is not equipped to operate in the virtual world. Members stayed in touch via email, and email contact was also maintained with the MFC over mutual issues including responses to various consultations. The chairman attended some Board meetings virtually on Zoom.

### Outdoor Access

SANA continues to be a corresponding member of The **National Access Forum**, which monitors the operation of the **2003 Land Reform Act** and the **Scottish Outdoor Access Code** (SOAC) on behalf of the Scottish Government. Though fishing is not covered by the Act, the Code does offer basic advice to the public and to anglers on responsible behaviour, so it is important that we are aware of and comment on any proposed changes that might affect angling. SANA is represented by the NMFC secretary who receives NAF minutes and ancillary documents, and responds as necessary.

An SNH (now NatureScot) report on Access issues found problems associated with “wild” camping that grew during the Covid lockdown period. Mountaineering Scotland also launched a “considerate camping” campaign (copied to the SANA website). Anglers are not specifically blamed, but it is important that they are aware of and obey the good practice laid out in the SOAC.

### Wild Fisheries Reform (WFR)

The little progress made over the past couple of years has not been helped by the Covid pandemic. The Government continued to reaffirm its commitment to reform, but it seems to have been largely put on the back burner. There have been no moves on the proposed replacement of Protection Orders, with the Cabinet Secretary saying “*when time permits we shall address this*”. She added that “*given other priorities*” we will focus efforts on “*the twelve pressures on wild Atlantic salmon*”.

SANA’s Craig Campbell of the MFC keeps his finger on WFR, liaising with the Salmon and Recreational Fisheries department and keeping both the MFC and NMFC in the loop. He also continues to monitor and to and respond to, with NMFC participation, various SEPA consultations, including River Basin Management Planning, diffuse pollution and other threats to freshwater.

Responding to a consultation on the Scottish Forestry Corporate Plan and its intention to expand tree planting, we warned that though it aimed to protect native woodlands and wildlife like red squirrels and golden eagles it made no mention of fish, so we pointed out how fish and invertebrates can be affected by insensitive ploughing and dense planting of conifers which can result in over-shading and sedimentation in water courses.

### **Fisheries Management Scotland (FMS)**

FMS concentrates on salmon, and one of its directors advises civil servants on fisheries matters, though we rarely hear mention of trout and grayling. We are told that salmon habitat improvements benefit other species, which is generally true, but what about waters where salmon are not present? We continue to keep an ear to the ground and remind FMS of other-species management issues when we feel it necessary.

### **Clean water and Riverfly populations**

Many of our rivers aren't as badly affected by poor water quality as most south of the Border, but that is no cause for complacency. Clean water is essential for healthy fish stocks. Where farmers and land managers are negligent and allow chemicals and slurry run-off to enter drains and streams it can result in a build up of algae and sediment that can harm invertebrates and fish eggs downriver. Riverfly hatches are certainly widely less prolific than they used to be resulting in fewer rising trout. Poor salmon recruitment and minimal numbers of smolts reaching the sea may also be partly due to falling insect levels, particularly during the parr stage.

There are global worries over declining bee and terrestrial insect populations, to the extent that a new word has been coined - *insectageddon*, so more and regular river-fly and water quality monitoring by SEPA, River Trusts, Salmon Boards, and Angling Clubs would not come amiss (a good example is that of UCAPA on the Clyde).

### **Predation and General Licence consultation**

The NMFC and MFC responded independently to NatureScot's consultation on changes to the General Licence list in Scotland, both asking for cormorants and sawbills to be included on the list, but to no avail. It appears that birds are of more importance to NatureScot than fish.

### **Beavers**

Rewilding is currently in the news, with beavers quoted as a prime example of successful reintroduction. There is much on beavers on the NatureScot website where they say they are committed to continuing work to *"restore and manage beavers as an important way to protect Scotland's environment and respond to the climate emergency"*. Referring to a recent report, they say *"the positive effects of beaver activity may involve some challenges and the need to find solutions"*. While much evidence points to positive contributions to river ecosystems, the report recommends that *"more work is needed on understanding how the effects of beavers across multiple sites sum up to affect rivers at larger scales"*. It makes no mention of fish and how they may be affected.

Meanwhile, beavers are now protected and continue to expand their range, with some being transferred to various sites in England. There is no doubt that they are here to stay, and it remains to be seen what impact they will have on fisheries in the longer term, and how the Government management scheme will work..

Alan Ayre

Feb 2022