



# **RIVER DOON DISTRICT** **SALMON FISHERY BOARD**

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## **MINUTES OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

### **AND PUBLIC MEETING**

Of

### **THE RIVER DOON FISHERY BOARD**

**At Dalblair House, 46 Dalblair Road, Ayr**

**On Friday 26 April, 2019**

<u>PRESENT:</u>	<u>NAME:</u>	<u>ORGANISATION:</u>
	Alan Macdonald	Chairman
	David Cosh	Doonfoot Fishings
	Carlos Van Heddegem	Holms Fishing
	Lawrence Dagleish	Board Member
	Peter Kennedy	Doonholm
	Peter Kennerley	Auchendrane
	Douglas Stanley	Monkwood Mill
	Robert Brown	Darymple Angling Club
	Allan Ferrie	Macmanniston
	Jim Caldwell	Monkwood
	Stuart Brabbs	Ayrshire Rivers Trust
	A.M. Thomson	Clerk

### APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:

Apologies were received from Liz Goldie and David Watson.

### MINUTES OF LAST MEETING:

The Minutes of the Meeting held on Thursday 19 April 2019 had been circulated and were approved. Proposed By: Alan Macdonald and Seconded by: David Cosh.

### MATTERS ARISING:

There were no matters arising.

CHAIRMAN'S  
REPORT:

The official Scottish Government salmon catch statistics for 2018 were released recently. These are the lowest since records began in 1952 with a salmon rod catch of 37,196 being the lowest on record. Environmental change and range of human impacts across the northern hemisphere are placing salmon at risk across their natural range.

Some of the factors impacting on wild salmon may be beyond human control, but Scotland's Government and regulatory authorities now have a historic opportunity to do everything in their power to safeguard the species in those areas where they can make a difference. Salmon conservation must become a national priority in what is the international year of the salmon.

We are calling on all regulatory authorities urgently to place a renewed emphasis on the crucial importance of salmon conservation. There are many samples where possible interventions have already helped, but more must be done. This will require Scottish Government and agencies to co-ordinate their efforts to protect salmon in a way that isn't really happening currently.

Declining rod catches have a knock on effect on fragile rural economies and reduce the ability of Managers and Boards to raise money and support management and restoration activities.

The River Doon is classified as a Grade 1 river though we are in the process of having this classification reduced to a Grade 2 river. We as a Board, particularly in light of the fallen catches to the lowest level ever have initiated a voluntary 100% catch and release and this policy will be continued for the current season. This policy has upset some of the fishing clubs and let fishings but we are strongly of the view that we must do everything to protect the few salmon that make it back to our river. The fishing clubs and let fishings on the river have been substantially affected by the lack of catches and Drumrange and Kiers Fishing Club have written to the Board as they are in a perilous financial position and are seeking the Board's assistance on how the assessments will be paid for the 2019 season as this would allow the Club to raise funds and get the Club onto a more stable financial footing.

New proposals for Fish Farms have been proposed on the north east tip of Arran and also on Cumbrae, we in conjunction with Ayrshire Rivers Trust will object to these proposals through North Ayrshire Council and this is against the Government effectively giving a green light to agriculture development by supporting massive expansion of this industry.

The Hatchery at Dalmellington was not as successful this year as intended due to the lack of hen fish in the rivers and also issues with the water cleanliness supplying the Hatchery. The alevins have now been distributed by Ayrshire Rivers Trust into the burns but going forward need to find a way to increase the production of the Hatchery which I feel should be a priority of the Board thus current year.

This year we again retained a bird licence to cull mergansers and goosanders and this work has been carried out and a report will be required to be sent to SNH in due course.

At the preceding Board Meeting the Board agreed that the Assessment Rate for the current year would be reduced from last year's rate 35 pence in the pound to 25 pence in the pound in the hope that this would assist some of the proprietors and clubs in particular who were finding themselves in financial difficulties due to declining club membership.

Financially the Board is well placed to continue with river improvements and we will work hard in the coming years to improve the salmon catches.

AYRSHIRE  
RIVERS TRUST  
REPORT:  
STUART  
BRABBS:

Hatchery

In total, 14,777 alevins were produced and planted into the burns around Dalmellington in particular areas where their survival to smolt may be assessed.

The Hatchery appears to be suffering from excessive sediment contamination and this may lead to survival issues. It is unclear why this is occurring and how best to resolve it. We have recommended a water sample be analysed by a lab to distinguish whether the sediment is peat or brown algae and identify other water quality parameters. Once the source of this material is identified, then a solution may become obvious.

ART will continue to work with the Board to improve Hatchery results.

Electrofishing Report

Results indicated that 2017/18 spawning success/survival was improved in the middle river and this is encouraging. Overall while the results were above the 10 year average, they were down on 2017

results (which were generally good across Ayrshire and the best on the Doon since 2013). Encouragingly, results were up on the 2014 levels (which was the year that most of the spawners contributing to the 2018 results were produced and thus a net gain was achieved).

While declines were recorded on the Much Water during the course of ART's assessments of the SWS power line installation, we are unable to seek mitigation/compensation measures as we are unable to prove conclusively that this was directly as a result of the works. The Muck contributes greatly to the upper river output and should be protected at all costs.

#### National Electrofishing Programme for Scotland (NEPS)

We welcome the inclusion of local electrofishing data gathered by ART into the conservation model but have questions and concerns about the spread of sampling across Ayrshire. We hope NEPS is extended to 2019 and beyond as it seems obvious that this will refine and improve the accuracy of classifications going forwards.

We have reviewed the draft report and will feed back our comments at a biologists meeting with MSS on May 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> prior to the report's publication which is expected mid-May 2019.

#### Catch Returns and Conservation Status

MSS to reflect the refinements in the model and a declining 5 year average catch return has downgraded the river to Category2. ART supports this change and believes this is the correct status at this point in time. The Board should continue to promote catch and release and measures designed to assist with conservation and improved stock production.

Fundamentally, refinements in the application of the model led MSS to the downgrade rather a decline in stocks. The model will continue to be refined and should become increasingly accurate, as local data are included.

While catches were disappointing in 2018 (286) it was an exceptionally dry summer in Ayrshire and all other rivers suffered too. The Doon had the highest reported rod catch of all local rivers and this was probably due to the compensation flow that maintains river levels in drought periods. Without this, rod catch would almost certainly have been substantially reduced. Even with the compensation flow, the absence of spates meant there was poor natural attraction to draw salmon into the inshore area and then the river.

We received reports of salmon entering and running between Christmas and New Year. We will only be able to assess spawning success once we complete electrofishing surveys in 2019.

Other rivers reported the following rod catches in 2018:-

- Ayr 136
- Stinchar 73
- Girvan 64

#### MSS Catch per Unit Effort

MSS announced that from 2019, proprietors and angling clubs will be required to submit details of the hours spent fishing in relation to their catches. This is already proving an unpopular requirement but it could provide valuable data on the stock levels over time and illustrate the influence of weather on spate river catches and also a decline or fluctuations in rod effort. We encourage the Board to promote compliance around the catchment and proprietors.

#### Skeldon Weir

The hydro operator installed 2 baulks on the dam at Skeldon to improve migration over the dam under lower flow conditions. ART helped with the installation and the location of the baulks. This was performed with SEPA's approval.

Within a week of installation, following a complaint from a nearby proprietor, SEPA ordered the baulks removed.

ART and the owner objected, however under pressure from SEPA, the owner removed the baulks three weeks later. The owner reported to ART that he had seen salmon using the deeper water created by the baulks.

#### Funding

ART has secured over £20,000 towards a research project that will help identify the levels of predation in river and losses at sea. More funding is yet required for this to be delivered and ART will continue to seek the shortfall.

This project will allow us to consider the impacts predation on smolts (both pike and piscivorous birds) while in river and then assess the numbers returning to the river following their marine life stages.

It will also allow an assessment and comparison of hatchery reared fry survival compared to wild salmon survival; a subject often hotly contested by anglers and scientists.

With other projects in the pipeline, ART currently has applications totaling nearly £0.5M before funders and awaiting decisions and some secured.

These include:-

- The European Maritime Fisheries Fund (EMFF) £19,100
- Minerals Trust £5256
- East Ayrshire Landscape Partnership £365K - £390K
- Biodiversity Challenge Fund £65,100
- Total Value £489,000

### Fencing

The last stretch of fencing on the Culroy Burn should be installed shortly completing the restoration and protection of the burn. Lower beats report that the river clears over 2 hours quicker as spates subside following this work.

Craigengillan has fenced 2 sections watercourses further to our discussions with him. The Glessel and the Dalcairney Burn has been fenced and trees planted where livestock were causing problems. Similarly, Yonderton has completed fencing under agri-grant schemes.

### Invasive Non Native Weeds

We continue to recommend and encourage owners and anglers to pull Himalayan Balsam on the river as it continues to spread despite efforts to control it. More effort is required as a new outbreak near Dalmellington in the last 3 years is spreading and making successful control difficult. It is essential that anglers assist as they are on the river more than others.

### Aquaculture

Earlier this year, ART notified Boards that there were scoping options lodged with North Ayrshire Council and Argyll and Bute Council for new fish farms off Arran, Little Cumbrae and Bute.

We lodged responses to these with Planners although as they are only at Scoping stages, no planning applications have been made to which objections can be addressed. We are working with FMS and other Trusts nearby to ensure robust and appropriate discussions and responses are made and hopefully subsequent planning applications may be overturned. We expect more applications for Ayrshire to follow as the industry seeks to expand.

### CLERK'S REPORT AND DRAFT ACCOUNTS:

The Clerk reported that the current credit balance stood at £18,557.39.

There are a number of outstanding Assessments and the Clerk will take steps to ingather these.

The Draft Accounts were presented by the Clerk who advised that the increased subscription was due to the increase last year in the levy rate and that there had been additional Bailiffs expenses and expenditure on Bailiffs equipment.

As confirmed in the Chairman's Report the rate for the current year will be 25 pence in the pound.

ANY OTHER  
COMPETENT  
BUSINESS:

The question of Bailiffs tickets was raised and Carlos confirmed that he required photographs in passport style in order that the tickets can be renewed.

Robert Brown raised a question about bailiffing and it was confirmed there was no evidence of any poaching at the top of the River and it was suggested that volunteers could be found to assist with a project say running of the Hatchery providing of course this was not banned in a forthcoming Report.

It was reported that fencing had been carried out at Macmanniston and all silt and slime has been greatly improved by the installation of fencing.

DATE OF  
NEXT  
MEETING:

To be arranged.

The Meeting then closed with a Vote of Thanks to the Chair.