

RIVER BLADNOCH DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD

Annual meeting Proprietors and Annual Public Meeting
Held at Bruce Hotel, Newton Stewart on Tuesday 26th November 2013

In the Chair Sir Michael Wigan, Chairman

Clerk, Peter Murray.

The Clerk opened the meeting advising that this was the first meeting under the Aquaculture and Fisheries (Scotland) Act 2013 although the year in review preceeded that Act coming into force. Accordingly tonight's meeting was effectively a joint meeting of the Annual Meeting of Proprietors and then the Annual Public Meeting. Board Members attending were Sir Michael Wigan, Richard Scott , Colin Richardson and Andrew Gladstone with apologies having been intimated to the Clerk by John Haley and Malcolm Adkin. the Board's Report was read to the whole meeting by the Chairman.

Thereafter the Accounts for the year to 31st August 2013 were circulated.

Thereafter questions were invited from the floor.

Concern was expressed as to what happened to the smolts after they had entered Wigtown Bay. It was noted that they then had the arduous journey right up the west coast of Scotland passed all the Fish Farms. Whilst it was well known that rivers north of the fish farms had a much better return of Smolts than those south of the farms it was physically impossible to prove that smolts were being killed by sea lice emanating from these farms. The cost of tracking of prohibitive and any smolt being affected by sea lice was still likely to be eaten by predators.

It was noted that the netting on the river had now been stopped for a good number of years and one would have expected to have seen some improvement but this was not the case.

Doubt was expressed as to whether the chemical balance of the water in the Bladnoch was sufficient to sustain any large increase in fish numbers. It was noted that in the past SEPA had advised the Board that they were carrying out water quality tests but no Report had ever been given to the Board and feeling of the meeting was that this had simply been a deception by SEPA from the outset.

There appeared to be no fish running at the back end of the season as although the Barhoise fish trap caught 15 they were all black and accordingly had been in the river for some time. This however is a problem affecting not only the Solway rivers but the whole of the west coast of the United Kingdom. Sea lice were now/

now prolific throughout the North channel of the Atlantic. It was considered that Marine Scotland should be tackling this before issuing any Consents for renewable energy projects.

Although scientific evidence was almost impossible to collect it was accepted common knowledge that the east coast of Scotland and the west coast of Ireland fared much better than the west coast of Scotland and the east coast of Ireland because of the different routes the smolts had to take going north.

However it was considered that there was no chance of any progress in rectifying this under the present the Scottish Government who were committed to expanding fish farms throughout.

It was also noted that acidification was still a major problem and this should not be lost sight of. It was noted that GFT were applying for a grant to enable them to obtain mobile water monitoring equipment.

The question was then raised from the floor as to why the Bladnoch had not tried liming. Jamie Ribbens from the GFT replied that they had tried putting in lime gravel three years ago but SNH had put a stop to this. With the Bladnoch being an SAC no experimental projects were allowed however the GFT would now be holding that the experiments on the Cree and the Fleet with liming should be taken as completed research enabling the Bladnoch now to proceed with a similar scheme.

To sum up the meeting requested the Board during the forthcoming year to:-

1. Press both SNH and SEPA for a liming project on the river and to press both organisations to name matters which they considered were wrong with the river.
2. To continue investigations into obtaining a fish counter with a caveat that if one was obtained it should not be set up in a good fishing pool.
3. Continuing with stocking the river provided it is not impacting on the wild population.

It was felt that the Board had been quite correct to refuse to extend the season and whilst in many ways the feeling was that the season should finish at the end of September it was appreciated that this would have a serious impact on commercial fisheries but it was felt that the Board should consider total catch and release in October.

4. The Board was asked to investigate the position at the Torhouse Fish Farm to see whether the smolts were getting into the farm or being stranded at the intake.

5. The Board to put pressure on Marine Scotland regarding the sea lice problem and the likely impact of off shore windfarms on salmon in the Boards area.

Finally it was noted that somebody had been seen fishing for mullet using a method which involved stretching a net across the river and it was pointed out that if this was in the rivers system then this was illegal but if it was in the estuary then it probably was legal.

The meeting closed at 7:05pm.

DRAFT: PMM/DMD/RIVEB01-03