MINUTE OF MEETING OF THE SPEY DISTRICT FISHERY BOARD IN OPEN SESSION held at the Fochabers Instituteand online, commencing at 9.30 a. m. on Friday 1st September 2023

## Present: -

**Chairman** Dr Alexander Scott (AS) Craigellachie Fishings

**Proprietors** Angus Gordon Lennox (AGL) The G.C. Gordon Lennox Estate Company Ltd

Callum Robertson (CR) Easter Elchies

William Mountain (WM)\* Delfur Fishings

Peter Graham (PG) Rothes & Aikenway

David Greer (DG) Seafield Estates

**Co-Optees** Sandy Howie (SH) River Spey Anglers Association

**In Attendance** Roger Knight (RK) Director

Atticus Albright (AA) Biologist

Neil Torrance (NT) Clerk

Jennifer Heatley (JH) Nature Scotland

Tom Mountain\* ™

Harry Mountain\* (HM)

\*Attending via video conference

**WELCOME,** **INTRODUCTIONS AND CONFLICTS**

The Chairman noting that the meeting is in fact a blended meeting with some attendees (\*) participating by video conference with a special mention to both Tom Mountain and Harry Mountain.

1. **APOLOGIES and CONFLICT**

Apologies had been received from Guy Macpherson-Grant, George Wills, Grant Mortimer, Toby Metcalfe and Paul Hughes.

The chairman then asked those present to record any conflict of interest they may have and there were none.

Prior to moving on to the other agenda items there was a discussion prompted by PG in relation to the formation of the meeting agenda and whether it should be focussed more in alignment with our strategy document, mission statement and 5 principles of strategy, with the strategy reported on at each meeting. The director pointing out that his report covers the mission statement and goes through our strategy step by step, in addition to the minutes of the previous meetings and a summary of action points. The Chairman agreeing to do a RAG report against strategy for each meeting where we have got to.

**ACTION: RAG Report to be created to monitor Board Strategy progress.**

1. **MINUTES OF THE OPEN SESSION OF THE MEETING ON 26TH MAY 2023**

The Chairman requested any comments on the minutes.

No comments or questions, and as such the Chairman noting the Minutes as approved.

1. **MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES**

The Action Point Summary documentwasproduced and circulated to the Board by the Director in advance of today’s meeting with a list of points and current status referred to.

The Director then running through it, noting a number being historic were either actioned or ongoing and other specifically dealt with in either the Director’s report or the Biologist’s report.

As no comments on the remaining actions points not so covered were made, the Chairman inviting the Director to deal with his report.

1. **DIRECTOR’S REPORT**

In line with the request made at the last meeting, both the Director’s report and the Biologist’s report were to be read by the members in advance with the intention that any questions on the reports would be raised at the meetings rather than the reports being presented.

The Director referring to the extensive report produced to the Board, as usual, in advance of today’s meeting, dealing with all aspect over the last reporting period.

Thereafter comments or questions invited on each section in order

**Scottish Government Wild Salmon Strategy**

PG querying what Caroline Cowan, the new Deputy Director of the Marine Directorate, meant when she referred to a focus on narrower priorities. The Director advising as to his view on what was referred to with reference to the Scottish Government's Programme for Government on which further comment is awaited and no further detail having been supplied. PG referring to the lack of any international figure leading the charge on behalf of salmon and whether as an industry, irrespective of government, we should be trying to take forward in conjunction with colleagues in Norway to identify and appoint such a person who could bring pressure at government level. Discussion ensuing as to whether that is the Atlantic Salmon Trust’s job and whether they are undertaking that, as well as who could be put forward to them. The Chairman suggesting this is put on the agenda for discussion at the next Big 4 meeting. AGL commenting that the issue is what is happening at sea and while it is not in the Board's remit to deal with the sea, we can encourage, that it is a point well made that we can cajole and he agrees that we do need a standard bearer. On that point commenting that any standard bearer might split opinion and the job is to come up with someone that all can accept.

**ACTION: Central figure and “standard bearer” for salmon to be discussed at next Big Four Rivers Meeting.**

**Spring Catches**

Serious concerns expressed as to the decreased catches from the river. Comments as to what is occurring on the other rivers. Communications as to what is occurring to continue with overview of the tenor of the way information is imparted. CR raising the lack of reacting to the season’s patterns of fishing as regards length of season and number of rods. Discussion as to whether it is self-regulating and the financial or business nature of the beat owners, with suggestion to encouraging people that when we get to certain temperatures they should not be fishing while explaining to them why. General acceptance that the Board do not have the authority to tell people when to or not to fish.

Also, a discussion raised as to the cutoff date for spring catches, the historical basis and the comparison of results with previous results/reports. WM then prompted a discussion of the issue of catch reporting, whether all provide such reports and whether it is a legal requirement.

**A Fish Counter for the Spey**

The director commenting that the central point to make about fish counters is that those currently available are effectively sonar cameras rather than counters. They take images of the fish, and those images then need to be analysed by a person who can review the camera film and video film, interpret it, take measurements and record the data. Additionally, these cameras cannot distinguish between a four-pound grilse and a four-pound seatrout or a four-pound pink salmon. They also do not account either for fish migrating up and down the river. Concluding that finding money for all the counters/cameras may be the easy bit, while monitoring and interpreting that data is the most significant and time-consuming/costly part. Even then it is only going to give some of the picture, some of the time. In effect the technology does not yet properly exist to achieve what is in the minds of the people who raised the issue. AGL undertaking meantime to report back to the instigating/requesting parties.

**ACTION: AGL to report back to Brae Water Trustees the issues regarding fish counters.**

**Seals**

AGL advising as to the problematic experience with seal incursions into the lower river over the last couple of weeks. The Director advising that he wasn’t previously able to report, because it happened only in the last few days, but Fisheries Management Scotland have been told by the Marine Directorate that there may be some funding available for deployment of Acoustic Deterrent Devices, and they have been asked which Boards would be interested. The Director confirming that he has advised that we would definitely be interested and provisionally asked for funding for two of them. The devices would be initially triggered manually by ghillies when there was a seal present. Commenting that if we could even trial Acoustic Deterrent Devices, it would help our seal licence applications. PG commenting that the reason we are seeing seals in our river is what is happening offshore, where their food source is being swept up, and as such we are treating the symptom, not the disease. AGL commenting on the change to the 3-mile limit in 1984 and the consequences of that. The Chairman referring to the earlier discussion and the actions to be taken re review with the Big 4 rivers etc.

**ACTION: Seals to be added to the Agenda for the next Big Four Rivers Meeting.**

**Beavers**

The Director advising as to his visit with DG to the South Clunes estate, south of Beauly, where they have had beavers for 15 years and it is reported that beavers have been found to be sustainable in terms of migratory fish still finding their way through, around or over the dams that have been created.

AGL querying what has occurred in relation to our letters and the Director updating. PG querying what the concern is about the introduction of beavers when looking at the bigger picture. The Chairman agreeing with the sentiment, as he had previously expressed. The Director confirming that we, through AA, are working close with the Cairngorms National Park Authority as to locations, monitoring etc. The discussion concluding with a view that these matters could or should be reviewed by the Scientific Committee to report to the Board.

**ACTION: Beaver interactions with salmonids to be discussed by Spey Scientific Committee.**

**Digital Marketing & Communications**

The Director commenting on the work undertaken by Paul Hughes and reminding the Board that we only have him part-time, since April, as his time is now split between the Board and the SCI.

No other areas to be highlighted or questions from the Board members. The Chairman then inviting the Biologist to deal with his report.

1. **BIOLOGIST’S REPORT**

In line with the new process, his report has been produced in advance for review and discussion.

WM promoting a discussion on the pH value of the river water, what the range should be, monitoring of the same, if there was a spike would we know about it and what impact it would have on fish catches? The Biologist responding that the pH varied between 6 70 7.5, with occasional acidic flushes from e.g. the Livet, but the Board did not hold long-term data on this.

The Chairman referring to the Biologist recommendation about Arctic Char and where the CNPA might be happy to fund. AA to follow that up and he understands that they might indeed.

**ACTION: Biologist to pursue Arctic Char translocation with CNPA.**

AGL querying the trapping and trucking results and a discussion ensuing as to the success or otherwise of the test. AA advising that the data still has to be fully reviewed and full report prepared for the Board. Discussions on papers produced in other countries re trapping and trucking pros and cons. PG suggesting that a conversation be had with the Connon Board as they have, under sponsorship from SSE, for some time been trying to divert descending smolts into smolt traps to trap and truck and have tried out all sorts of options to try and put them into a backwater, where they can then trap them effectively.PG also commenting that these matters again should be filtered through the Scientific Committee and questioning why the Board had a Scientific Committee.

**ACTION: The future of the Scientific Committee to be discussed at the November Board Meeting.**

**ACTION: Scientific Committee to meet to discuss recent scientific work.**

1. **AOCB**
2. AGL advising that the Clerk has written to Scottish Water re the Dipple Wellfields and the history of matters. Clerk confirming acknowledgement to date received. Substantive response to be chased.
3. AGL commenting that the “Release the Spey” campaign is noted as slightly on hold due to the restrictions on PH’s time, but he is seeking to encourage the Board not to give up on the campaign. The Chairman confirmed that PH will be asked by the Director to refocus on that.

**ACTION: Paul Hughes to be encouraged to promote the “Release the Spey” campaign.**

The Chairman noting that there was no other business for the Open session.

1. **DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING**

The date of the next meeting confirmed as Friday 17th November 2023 commencing at 9.30 a.m., to be a blended meeting - physical venue to be confirmed.

The meeting then closed at 10.55 a.m.