

MINUTES of MEETING of THE RIVER DEVERON DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD
being a Meeting open to the public in terms of the Aquaculture & Fisheries (Scotland) Act 2013
on Wednesday 1st December 2021 at 12 noon via video conferencing using MS Teams.
This meeting was held in conjunction with that of the TRUSTEES of THE DEVERON, BOGIE & ISLA RIVERS
CHARITABLE TRUST. The minutes cover both organisations.

At the outset the Chairman explained that in terms of the 2013 Act, all Meetings require to be open to the public. An invitation to the public was published on the Board's website along with a copy of the proposed Agenda. Any member who wished to attend was required to inform the Clerk.

Present: **Jim Cruickshank** (B&T), **Andrew Allwood** (B), **Frank Henderson** (B & T) (Turriff Angling Association & Turriff Community), **Richard Breakell** (B), **Andrew Higgins** (B).

In attendance- **Mrs S Roebuck** (Clerk to Board and Administrator of DBI Trust); **Marcus Walters** (DBI Trust) **Richie Miller** (B and representative of DBI Trust).

{B = Board member; T = Trustee or representative}

Chairman: Mr Andrew Allwood

Apologies for Absence & Welcome Gordon Morison (B), C Richard Marsden (B), David Borthwick (B & T), Mrs J Player (B), Matthew Marsden (B), Robert Copland (B), Robert Shields (B & T), Rory Cooper (B & T)

Mr Andrew Allwood informed members of the recent death of Mr Johnny Stancioff. Members sent their sincerest condolences to the family and friends of Mr Stancioff.

Minutes of Meeting on 9th September 2021 A draft of the Minutes of the Meeting had been sent to all Members of the Board and Trust and unanimously approved by those who had attended. The minutes have been published on the Board/Trust's website (www.deveron.org) and signed by the Chairman of the Meeting.

There were no queries nor matters outstanding.

Aquaculture and Fisheries (Scotland) Act 2013 Mr Allwood reported that there were no changes noted to Board Members Financial Interests since 9th September 2021 as applicable to the Board. No complaints against the Board had been received by the Clerk since the last meeting.

Update on Financial Matters Mrs Roebuck reported the last quarterly accounts to 30th September had been circulated and the ones for December will be issued in January. Mrs Roebuck informed the Board that four beat assessments were outstanding, totalling £4,168.50. It was explained that copious reminders were sent. Final reminders will be issued shortly.

A donation from the Board amounting to £31,500 had been paid to the Trust.

The meeting then focused on Trust Business.

Mrs Roebuck reported that bank balances in both organisations were healthy.

The valuation of the Trust investment held by McInroy and Wood was £151,332.87.

Mr Cruickshank explained that the Trust may look to the improvement fund if required, when the Sonar Counter and Pit Tagging Project takes off. This project, along with the King Edward Burn project could require extra help which will mean the Trust may need to draw on more cash.

Mr Miller expressed that at a previous board meeting the use of the funds held at McInroy and Wood was discussed, and some members were uncomfortable with the funds being used for the fish counter project since it was not what it was originally intended for.

**River Deveron
Conservation Code**

The projected categorisation from the Scottish government for the Deveron for 2022 is a Category 2.

Mr Miller suggested that the Angling Code 2022 should remain the same as the previous year.

Mr Allwood pointed out that any further additions to the code would probably make it more complex, less focused and more difficult to read and understand. All agreed. Mr Cruickshank and Mr Higgins both announced that they planned to modify their policy on spinning by allowing guests to spin only if granted permission by the ghillie or owner. Mr Henderson approved, but raised a concern that some anglers or proprietors might be unhappy if they felt the river was being promoted as fly only. All agreed that this should not be board policy, but welcomed any additional conservation measures that might be adopted voluntarily by beat proprietors.

Mr Allwood questioned the use of worms when fishing. Mr Miller explained the use of worms is not recommended unless the angler is under the age of 16.

The 2022 code and guidance on releasing fish safely will be circulated to proprietors early in the new year.

**Report by Mr Miller &
Mr Walters on DBI Trust
work**

Mr Miller, Director of the Trust, and Mr Walters, River Operations Manager, had prepared a written report on the work of the Trust since the last Board Meeting and this was e-mailed to all members **(available on request from the Clerk)**.

Social Media- The number of public followings on social media is increasing and this has helped to bring in new partners. The ambassadors at Bacardi started to notice the presence of the river through social media and has agreed some sponsorship for next years' river opening ceremony.

Fishery Development

Mr Jim Murray an actor and AST ambassador visited the river during October with some guests including the angling writer, Dani Morey. Their visit was covered in the latest edition of Trout and Salmon Magazine and on social media.

Twin Peakes flyfishing are now offering fly fishing packages on the Deveron which will help to bring new visitors to the river. More details to be found at <https://twinpeakesflyfishing.com/>

Fishery Protection- The Trust has been focusing on pinch points for the last few weeks, where salmon can get stuck mainly in Keith. Weekend and after dark patrols have been increased but no illegal fishing has been observed since the incidents in the early summer.

Electrofishing Results- The fry numbers in the areas that salmon would be expected were encouraging but Parr numbers has raised concern as they were lower than what would have been expected at these sites.

Water Quality – No further updates have been received from SEPA, but they hope to bring in their own pesticide monitoring across Scotland shortly. SEPA is in discussions with JHI about what can be done in terms of liaising with each other and looking at the situation. The latest samples show that the presence of these pesticides is at very low levels but these will still require investigating further.

The Trust is working with Craig Macadam from Buglife to look at the invertebrate data throughout the river and investigate how they have changed over a 15-to-20-year period.

Bird Count – A full year bird count was completed, and the Trust intend to keep the counts going as best as possible with volunteer effort. Four bird counts will be conducted between September and April to help with the license application for year 2022. The latest count showed similar pattern to last year where there was an upturn in Goosanders and Cormorants on the river at this time of year.

Mr Allwood asked for clarification on the part of the river system that the bird count was going to take place for March and April. Mr Miller explained the bird counts will be from Avochie to Banff. Mr Allwood added the bird counting has been intensive and results have shown that there are more birds at this time of year than there is in March and April, which is what the government is basing their assessments on for the license. Autumn and winter months are when the damage is happening, and less activity is seen in the springtime. Mr Allwood suggested if the government remains fixated on two months were there might be less activities, trying to cover as much of the river as possible would be ideal to get a more accurate figure. Mr Miller explained that the license runs from 1st Oct to May and that the government will now consider the November count where activity is at its highest. This allows for a true representation in terms of the highest numbers of birds at certain times. Mr Miller explained that it is possible to increase the count area, but these areas won't be included by the government until 3 – 5 years of consecutive counts.

Mr Cruickshank asked about the extent of the activity of Goosander and Cormorants on the Turriff Burn. Mr Miller explained the Turriff and King Edward burn are more than capable of supporting goosander at certain times of the year, albeit they prefer to be on more open water for their own safety. However, they do use the Turriff Burn at certain times. Mr Miller agreed to include a section or the majority of the two tributaries for one winter count or one spring count to give a better understanding if they are using those areas.

2021 Rod Catch – The final figure of salmon and grilse is yet to be confirmed but expected to be around 900 which is considerably less than the 2019 (1483) and

2020 (1504) catch. The angling effort was increased this year but still not back to the pre covid levels.

Mr Andrew Allwood added that the figure of 900 fish caught is a steep decline from the previous 2 years. There was a much better rod effort and a very serious decline in number of fish. Furthermore, the electrofishing counts that Mr Walters shows in the catchment areas are equally showing worrying declines. Mr Walters referred to the map circulated and explained that when these sites are visited there is an expectation based on the habitat they see and a lot of the black dots on the map are minor ditches where there would not be many if any salmon present. Mr Walters added that he would not have expected any salmon fry in many of the areas where there is no fry reported.

Mr Cruickshank expressed that the count information and the juvenile salmon information point to a habitat issue if both are suffering.

There was a general discussion on the Fry and Parr Electrofishing results.

Health and Safety – The Trust are still following government covid-19 guidelines. The office is closed to the public and staff are testing regularly.

As part of a government contract next year the Trust is looking into canoe training for team members to track tagged smolts.

Habitat Restoration – As previously reported the King Edward system was surveyed and a report was produced. The report gives an overview of the issues there and what could be done. Pressure has been put on SEPA to look at some of the issues. SEPA have visited a lot of the landowners and the farms there already. Mr Miller reported that the Trust is working on getting a bid together for a Nature Restoration Fund which is being launched by SNH next year. The Trust aims to bring in part time staff to prepare for this and if that is not possible, this will be done internally. Landowner permission is key and priority areas must be determined before the fund goes live.

Glenkeith Weir Fish passage – Through our own pressure and working with SEPA, Chivas have agreed to start scoping out options for a new and permanent fish pass. Mr Miller added that if fish can get up through Keith consistently without any trouble and spawn it will be a significant step in increasing the production for that area.

Morison Trophy – Mr Miller congratulated Mr Richard Breakell, the winner for 2021.

River Opening Ceremony – The opening of the salmon season will be held at Turriff AA on 11th Feb 2022 at 10am. Actor and Atlantic Salmon Ambassador, Jim Murray and Actress Sarah Parish (tbc) will do the honours.

Atlantic Salmon Trust Collaboration – Next year will be the final year of the Missing Salmon Project where 100 smolts will be tracked going down the river and look at how many get out successfully.

There will be pit tagging equipment and a sonar installed, funded by Marine Scotland science which will have an estimated total value of around £210,000. Marine Scotland will retain ownership of the kit and are planning to self-insure. Insurance for the counter equipment we will be required for malicious damage or theft.

AST have agreed to fund half the annual projected running costs for the counter for the first three years. A review will take place after the three-year period ends and if it was proceeding satisfactorily, they will look at funding the remaining 7 years. The Board and Trust and 3rd party supporters must cover the remaining running costs.

Auction – A Dinner auction will be held on Friday 16th September at the Banff Springs Hotel.

2022 Work Plan

Mr Miller reported that the priorities for the Trust for the coming year include the following:

- Working with Chivas Regal and SEPA to get the fish pass designs off the ground and get the pass built the following year.
- The two habitat restoration priorities remain the Crooksmill Burn and the King Edward Burn. This will be approached by applying for the SNH Restoration fund and for the work to be done internally or take on a new member of staff for 2-3 months.
- The Fish telemetry side is a significant part of the work for next year with the counter and pit tagging equipment going in early next year.
- There is a potential Marine Scotland project that looks at two different tagging types and the success of the fish leaving the river. It has potential of good income which can be used locally for other projects, but this will not be confirmed until early January.
- Scottish Invasive Species Initiative will run for another year-until October 2022.

AOCB – Annual Award

Mr Cruickshank congratulated Mr Robert Shields on being the recipient of the **Major Contribution Award**. Mr Cruickshank expressed that Mr Shields has done a huge amount of voluntary work with the Trust and given up a lot of his time and a substantial amount of his money to get the Trust off the ground. Mr Shields deserves to be the recipient of this award to acknowledge all the work that he did in the early years of the Trust.

Mr Cruickshank suggested presenting the award at the Opening Ceremony and making the announcement on social media in advance.

AOCB – 2022 Meeting dates:

Dates are now confirmed as:

Thurs 7th April, Thurs 7th July, Thurs 8th Sep (AGM), Wed 7th Dec.

Meeting closed at 1:50pm

Mr Allwood thanked everyone for attending.

Next meeting – Thurs 7th April. Location to be confirmed.

