

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
Thursday 24th September 2026 at 3.30pm held at The Banff Springs Hotel, Banff.
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: **Andrew Allwood (B), Jim Cruickshank (B&T), Bob Copland (B), Rory Cooper (B & T), Andrew Higgins (B), Robert Shields (B & T), Gordon Morison (B). Steve Mackinson (T)**

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

Members of the Public: Sarah Cruickshank. Conner Morison.

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

Chairman: **Mr Andrew Allwood**

Apologies for Absence: **Matthew Marsden (B), Frank Henderson (B & T)** (Turriff Angling Association & Turriff Community), **Richard Breakell (B)** (Salmon Anglers), **Alfie Cheyne (B).**
Jamie Gordon (Project Deveron Catchment Restoration Manager).

Minutes of Meeting on 25th June 2026 A draft of the Minutes of the Meeting had been sent to all Members of the Board and Trust and was unanimously approved by those who had attended. The minutes have been published on the Board/Trust's website (www.deveron.org) and signed off by the Chairman of the Meeting.

Aquaculture and Fisheries (Scotland) Act 2013 Mr Allwood reported that there were no changes noted to Board Members Financial Interests since 25th June 2026 as applicable to the Board. No complaints against the Board had been received by the Clerk since the last meeting.

Update on Financial Matters - RDDSFB The Clerk gave a brief overview of the Board's financial position. There remained 17 fishery assessments outstanding and reminders would be issued following the meeting. The Board's bank balance remained healthy.

The position regarding Mr Shaw's outstanding assessment payments was discussed. Only £133 remained outstanding from previous amounts, although the current year's assessment would also fall due. The last payment had been received in June and, after a period of regular payments, these had subsequently ceased. It was agreed that the Chairman would contact the solicitors again to establish what further action could be taken.

The annual accounts had been finalised and signed with an abbreviated version included within the Annual Report. Members were invited to raise any questions on the accounts or other financial matters; none were raised.

Discussion of Forthcoming AGM

Members noted that the Annual Proprietors Meeting/AGM would follow at 5.00pm and that time for the joint Board/Trust meeting was therefore limited.

Mr Walters would give a presentation at the AGM providing a fuller overview of the ARIS fish counter and other monitoring and project work.

Mr Henderson, who had submitted apologies, had also raised an observation regarding the number of small sea trout being caught. Concern was expressed that fish of this size might be difficult to distinguish from brown trout on the sonar counter. It was noted that video verification during certain periods could assist, and that a scale sample from one of the small fish could help determine age and growth. Behaviour was also discussed as a possible indicator.

Members were asked whether there were any particular matters they wished to raise at the AGM; none were identified.

AOCB – Spinning

The Chairman reported that he had received a telephone call from Mr Richard Breakell regarding the amount of spinning taking place during the exceptionally low-water conditions over the summer. Mr Breakell had questioned whether the Board should issue guidance or impose restrictions.

Members discussed the legal position and noted that spinning itself is not prohibited. Individual angling clubs and proprietors may impose their own rules on particular beats, but the Board's role would be limited to issuing guidance. Existing guidance already addresses fishing during low flows and high water temperatures.

The discussion considered whether spinning necessarily created greater welfare concerns than fly fishing. It was noted that, in some circumstances, a salmon hooked on spinning tackle could be landed more quickly than one played for a prolonged period on fly tackle. Pool depth and local conditions would also affect the most appropriate method. It was further noted that the Deveron has not historically been a fly-only river and that spinning can provide an accessible introduction to fishing for young or inexperienced anglers.

Members agreed that individual beats should manage conduct where one angler's method adversely affects the enjoyment of others. If the concern was simply that fish were being caught by spinning, this was not considered a matter in which the Board should intervene.

The Chairman agreed to speak to Mr Breakell again to clarify his concerns and establish whether he wished to make any specific proposal. The matter could then be brought back to a future Board meeting if required.

AOCB – Appointment of Sarah Cruickshank

The Chairman advised that Sarah Cruickshank had expressed a wish to join the Board. Members welcomed her interest and noted her existing knowledge of the river and regular attendance at meetings.

Mr Allwood formally proposed her appointment. The proposal was put to the meeting and was unanimously approved. Sarah Cruickshank was therefore appointed to the Board.

Levy Assessment

A recent communication concerning the levy assessment was raised. It was confirmed that this was advance notice for internal discussion over the coming months rather than a matter requiring a decision at this meeting.

The meeting then focused on Trust Business

Update on Financial Matters – DBI Trust

Mr Cruickshank introduced the Trust financial business and confirmed that the annual accounts had been signed off. The latest figures showed a net surplus/net movement of approximately £9,430. Investment interest and gains were approximately £12,000, meaning that underlying trading activities had broadly broken even with a small operating loss. Members considered this a satisfactory outcome and consistent with the Trust's objective of using its resources for river conservation rather than accumulating unnecessary funds, while maintaining adequate reserves for unforeseen circumstances.

For the current financial year, the budget showed a projected deficit of approximately £20,000. It was noted that turnover had increased substantially, reflecting the volume of additional project activity. Because new funded projects can arise throughout the year, producing a precise annual budget is difficult; however, additional activities are generally expected to be self-funding.

The implications of the Trust's increasing turnover were discussed in detail. The Clerk advised that if income reached approximately £500,000 the Trust could become subject to a full audit, with an estimated additional cost in the region of £5,000–£10,000. Members discussed the importance of correctly accounting for restricted and unrestricted charitable funds and agreed that advice should be sought before the year end rather than waiting until the threshold had been reached.

The Clerk confirmed that she would contact the accountant in advance to clarify the audit requirements and likely costs. Members suggested obtaining quotations from suitable auditors/specialist charity accountants so that the Trust understood the options and costs before the December meeting.

Members recognised that the possibility of reaching the audit threshold was itself a reflection of the Trust's success in securing funding and increasing project delivery.

Report by Mr Miller and Mr Walters on DBI Trust work

Mr Miller advised that the written report was substantial and would not be read word-for-word. Mr Walters would provide a fuller presentation at the AGM. The principal matters discussed were as follows.

Communications and partnership funding: The Trust continues to provide updates through its social-media channels. Members welcomed the extension of the Chivas Brothers funding partnership for a further three years, supporting river-improvement projects including the King Edward works and tree planting. The Trust's 25th anniversary film had also received positive feedback.

Scottish Invasive Species Initiative/mink: Robert and Lewis continued catchment-wide giant hogweed control, working with volunteers, contractors and proprietors. Mink captures had increased, with approximately eight caught on the Deveron. Trapping efforts were being increased in areas of recent activity, particularly from the middle river downstream and along the coast, where there were concerns regarding nesting birds. The use of genetic analysis to track mink movement between catchments was also discussed.

Bailiffing and fishery protection: The Trust now has access to a thermal drone, which can be deployed in particular areas. Recent possible-poaching reports had been investigated; one incident was found to arise from differing permissions given by landowners, and there had also been reports of teenagers fishing without authority. Members discussed the loss of joint sea-patrol

capacity following staffing changes on the Spey. Alternatives included working with other rivers, local marine organisations or a third-party contractor, and potentially using drones and/or a rigid inflatable boat. Historic locations where illegal nets had previously been found could help target future operations.

Water scarcity and temperature monitoring: The exceptionally dry summer and very low river levels were discussed. Concern was expressed about SEPA's water-scarcity classification process. The Trust has a network of temperature loggers throughout the catchment, enabling hotspots to be identified. The longer-term aim is to add live monitoring equipment so that current conditions can be made available online to anglers and other users.

Bird licences: The bird-control licence was approved for 16 goosanders and four cormorants. Members agreed that an earlier start date should be considered for the next application to help address any September influx.

Wind farm monitoring/electricity infrastructure: The Trust continues to monitor major wind-farm developments to ensure river interests are protected, including the Dorenell and Clashindarroch extensions and other sites referred to in the report. Members also discussed the proposed Shetland 2/electricity infrastructure developments. The Board had already submitted a consultation response covering both potential sites and highlighting the importance of affected burns, runoff risks and existing electrofishing evidence. Preliminary surveys were also being undertaken where cable routes or access tracks cross burns on a related infrastructure project. Members considered whether further baseline work, including invertebrate surveys, would be useful before construction. It was noted that project timescales remained uncertain and that separate teams appeared to be dealing with different elements of the wider infrastructure proposals.

Seal management: The Board/Trust does not currently hold a seal licence, although licences had reportedly been granted elsewhere in northern Scotland. A suitable local person was willing to undertake the required training if a licence became available. Seals continued to be observed on the sonar and around Banff Bridge. The Trust has a grant-funded acoustic deterrent device which could be deployed if required, although seals may become accustomed to it.

Keith Weir fish pass: Chivas Brothers had agreed to fund the proposed new fish pass at the weir in Keith. The design was with the planning department and construction was now expected during 2027, rather than before the end of 2026 as originally hoped.

Agri-environment/farm liaison: Rosa Holt was undertaking farm liaison work and had started visits within the King Edward system, including discussions on additional buffer areas and development of a King Edward farm cluster. A land-ownership map of the catchment had been developed and would assist with engagement. The initial priority remained building a core group in the King Edward catchment, while taking suitable opportunities elsewhere where capacity allowed. Members suggested that Rosa attend a future meeting and noted the value of links with farming organisations and local farmers

ARIS fish counter: Mr Walters reported that the AI system introduced in 2025 had substantially reduced the amount of manual review required, with approximately 10% of data manually checked compared with 100% in earlier years. The report compared estimated upstream runs and rod catches over three years. Variation in exploitation rate was considered closely linked to river

conditions and water availability. The counter had operated well since returning from servicing in Seattle in February, although low water can reduce image quality and require frequent adjustments. It was hoped that the Deveron counter could remain operational throughout the winter, subject to servicing requirements.

PIT tagging and monitoring: The PIT-tagging project monitors tagged juvenile fish as they leave as smolts and, where possible, when they return as adults. Equipment failures during the smolt run had been mitigated by borrowing equipment from the Atlantic Salmon Trust. A persistent tag lying on an array had also caused interference; specialist scanning equipment was used successfully to locate and remove it. Approximately 2,000 parr had recently been tagged from the relevant tributaries despite difficult rising-water conditions.

Habitat restoration: Work continued to increase in scale across the catchment. The upper Isla remains a priority, particularly in anticipation of improved fish passage at Keith.

The Trust is working with estates and landowners on opportunities including tree planting and shade creation. A weir on the River Isla, Mill of Towie, with failing gabion baskets was also discussed; simple removal could create upstream erosion risks affecting a road bridge, so any intervention would require careful assessment. Members noted the importance of protecting smaller tributaries even where they are not major salmon producers.

Freshwater pearl mussels: Following occasional finds of old shells, an environmental DNA survey had been undertaken across the catchment. Faint indications had been found in the middle river and in a small tributary near Turriff, leading to a more detailed follow-up survey. If a likely location can be narrowed down, a physical search would be undertaken. Members noted that freshwater pearl mussels are extremely rare and that confirmation of a viable population could create opportunities for conservation funding. Results of the follow-up work were expected shortly.

Turriff Burn and other tributaries: Mr Miller confirmed that restoration opportunities beside the showground were being progressed and that the earlier Wild Trout Trust survey should be revisited, as relatively little of the recommended work appeared to have been implemented. Other tributaries around Keith were also discussed, including areas known to hold good fish numbers.

Project Deveron: Project Deveron, the collaboration with the Atlantic Salmon Trust linking river-monitoring technology with targeted restoration, had received an award during the previous week and had also been nominated for a Nature of Scotland Award.

The Scottish Government's scientific evidence review on beavers was also nearing completion; once published, Mr Miller would use it to support a further Board discussion and development of a position.

Annual report, anniversary and fundraising: Members had received the new annual report and accounts. Thanks were recorded to everyone who attended, donated prizes to, or bid at the 25th anniversary dinner and auction, which had achieved record attendance and was considered a significant endorsement of the team's work. The Chairman asked that the minutes specifically record his thanks to the whole staff team for their work during the year. Thanks were also expressed to the Cheyne family for their generous support and for hosting an

event which had raised approximately £3,000. The anniversary film and the parliamentary motion submitted by Alexander Burnett were also noted. A small number of 25th anniversary bottles remained available.

River grading: Members were advised that the Deveron would remain Grade 2 for 2027.

Eels: Members asked whether eel numbers appeared to be increasing and how they were monitored. Eel presence is recorded during electrofishing surveys, and a number had been encountered during fish collection for tagging, including large adults in excess of half a metre and one estimated at approximately 80 cm. Reports of substantial juvenile eel returns elsewhere around the Moray Firth were encouraging, although there was not yet sufficient evidence to conclude that the population was recovering. Dead eels with fungal growth had also been found in recent years and remained a concern.

Health and Safety The existing arrangements for staff medicals were noted: Mr Miller, Mr Walters and Mr C Grant will complete medicals on 26th September and 30th October. No other health and safety matters were reported at the meeting.

Next meeting The next scheduled Board/Trust meeting will be held on Wednesday 2nd December 2026 at 12.00 noon.

Meeting closed at 4:50pm Mr Allwood thanked everyone for attending. The Annual Proprietors Meeting and DBIT AGM followed.

Action Plan:

Clerk: Issue reminders for the 17 outstanding fishery assessments.

Chairman: Contact the solicitors regarding further action on Mr Shaw's outstanding assessment payments.

Chairman: Speak to Mr Richard Breakell to clarify his concerns regarding spinning and bring any specific proposal back to a future Board meeting if required.

Clerk: Contact the accountant before year end to confirm charity audit requirements and likely costs, and obtain suitable quotations/options for consideration before the December meeting.

Board/Trust: Consider an earlier start date for the next bird-control licence application.

Mr Miller: Review the Scottish Government beaver evidence review once published and use it to support a further Board discussion/position.