

MINUTES of the MEETING of THE RIVER DEVERON DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD,

a Meeting open to the public within the terms of the Aquaculture & Fisheries (Scotland) Act 2013 on Thursday 27th March 2025 at 12 noon at The Bank Cafe, Huntly.

This meeting was held in conjunction with that of the TRUSTEES of THE DEVERON, BOGIE & ISLA RIVERS CHARITABLE TRUST. These 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 and all social media accounts along with a copy of the proposed Agenda. Any member who wished to attend was required to inform the Clerk.

Members of the Public Present: Alison Baker

Present: **Jim Cruickshank (B&T), Andrew Allwood (B&T), Andrew Higgins (B), Robert Shields (B & T), Gordon Morison (B), Rory Cooper (B & T), Richard Breakell (B)**

In attendance-

Richie Miller (Director DBI Trust & Board), **Marcus Walters** (River Operations Manager - DBI Trust), **Sarah Roebuck** (Clerk to the Board and Administrator of DBI Trust)

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

Chairman: Mr Andrew Allwood

Apologies for Absence & Welcome Matthew Marsden (B), Robert Copland (B), Frank Henderson (B&T) (Turrieff Angling Association & Turrieff Community), David Borthwick (B & T), Alfie Cheyne (B)

Minutes of Meeting on 4th Dec 2024 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 4th December 2024 meeting as applicable to the Board. No complaints against the Board had been received by the Clerk since the last meeting.

Update on Financial Matters – Board The Board was informed that one beat assessment remains outstanding, despite multiple reminders having been issued via post and email. Mr. Allwood agreed to follow up on the matter.

Mrs. Roebuck reported that the Board's cashflow had been reviewed, as requested. She confirmed that it remains closely aligned with the assessment planning based on the most recent valuation date, and that financial targets are currently being met. A new Board budget will be presented at the June meeting.

AOCB – Poaching	<p>Mr. Miller advised that there is currently no significant activity to report for the present season.</p> <p>He further explained that, in light of several substantial ongoing projects, there may be a requirement for additional support during certain periods of the year. This support could potentially be sourced through volunteer bailiff engagement and/or remunerated assistance. He also noted that a number of individuals could be nominated to undertake the IFM bailiff examination, with the next scheduled for 31st May.</p> <p>Regarding the network of wildlife cameras, Mr. Miller reported that the existing setup continues to perform effectively, and they remain a valuable asset. He confirmed that there is no current need to increase the number of cameras, as they are routinely relocated to ensure comprehensive coverage.</p>
AOCB – Pesticide Training Sessions	<p>Mr. Morison noted that he had not been made aware that the course was taking place and indicated that he had several individuals who would have been interested in attending. Mr. Miller responded that further courses are planned and advised that the Invasive Species Officers would be in contact with the relevant details.</p>
AOCB – Chicken Effluent	<p>Mr. Morison raised concerns regarding chicken effluent, referencing recent events on the River Wye. He inquired about current monitoring efforts and highlighted the increasing application of chicken manure on agricultural land. Mr. Miller responded that there is no specific monitoring programme currently in place.</p> <p>Mr. Allwood suggested the implementation of a benchmark invertebrate study as a possible approach.</p> <p>Mr. Miller emphasised the need for a structured plan to assess how the waste is being managed and to ensure compliance with relevant standards.</p> <p>Ms Baker (AST) clarified that chicken manure is classified and sold as fertiliser, and as such, does not fall under waste regulations.</p>
AOCB – Fish Photography Guidelines	<p>Mr. Morison presented a Fish Photography Guideline Poster currently in use on the River Spey and recommended that similar procedures be adopted on the Deveron. He suggested that copies of the poster be displayed in each fishing hut. Mr. Miller let attendees know that a new Catch and Release best practice video will shortly be released also by Fisheries Management Scotland.</p>
AOCB – Turriff Show	<p>Mr. Morison suggested that the Deveron Trust take up a stand at the Turriff Show to increase visibility and promote its work. Mr. Miller confirmed that this is currently being explored for the current year in partnership with the Atlantic Salmon Trust and expressed optimism about securing a stand. He also noted the possibility of selling gin at the event, subject to obtaining an occasional licence.</p>
AOCB – Banff Bridge (Free passage of fish)	<p>Mr. Allwood informed the Board that the potential start date for the Banff Bridge remedial works has been confirmed as 11th August.</p>

Mr Miller highlighted that the Banff bridge is a key piece of work taking place within the catchment this year. As a listed structure, Aberdeenshire Council is committed to preserving it for the future. The bridge serves as a gateway to the Deveron and is considered the most important bridge—and section—of the entire river.

Mr Miller emphasised that significant pressure was placed on the project designers to ensure there would be no obstruction to migratory fish, no creation of a step, and that materials used would not degrade over time. Annual monitoring of the structure was also requested to ensure no shifting of materials over time would impede fish passage.

While the initial hope was for work to be carried out outside the fishing season, current timings are not expected to cause major disruption, as data from the last two years fish counter data suggests that the majority of fresh fish will have already entered the river by that date.

Due to the importance of the project, third-party advice was sought. **Trex Ecology** reviewed the design and assessed the fish passage aspects to ensure ecological integrity.

Mr Allwood enquired whether the Trust is actively involved in the monitoring phases of the project as it progresses. He asked if there is clarity on what work will be done and when. He raised concerns about the timing of the works, citing the potential impact of heavy machinery coinciding with the smolt run.

Mr Miller responded that the Trust has communicated its preferred timing for the works to minimise disruption to the river and its ecology. Although the Trust is not formally contracted to oversee the site, it will nonetheless continue to monitor the situation closely.

Mr Allwood sought reassurance that those undertaking the work would remain cooperative and coordinated, rather than operating without consultation. Mr Miller confirmed that the contractors have been constructive so far and noted that they demonstrated a similar approach during previous work at the site.

The meeting then focused on Trust Business.

Update on Financial Matters – Trust

Mr Cruickshank noted that there have been no changes since the last review. The Trust remains on track, with the latest figures still indicating a surplus. The only item potentially not yet reflected in the accounts is the purchase of a new vehicle, which is expected to leave the Trust with a positive balance overall.

Mrs Roebuck reported that the Trust budget will be prepared and presented at the June meeting.

The current valuation of the Trust's investment with McInroy and Wood stands at **£168,053**.

Report by Mr Miller & Mr Walters on DBI Trust work

Mr Miller, Director 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 (**Detailed report available on request from the Clerk**).

General discussions were had on the topics below:

- Communications
- Scottish Invasive Species Initiative (SISI).
- Fishery Protection
- Water Quality
- Bird Counts and license
- Health and Safety
- Windfarms
- Seal Licence
- Glenkeith Weir Fish Passage
- Rod Catch 2024
- Project Deveron – Phase 1
- Project Deveron – Phase 2
- River Opening Ceremony
- Beaulie to Blackhillock to New Deer to Peterhead 400k OHL
- Banff Bridge Scour Protection

Points Raised:

Himalayan Balsam: Mr Morison enquired about the issue of Himalayan Balsam and potential control measures. Mr Miller reported that while there has been some success in removing the plant from small areas, effective control requires sustained effort. He noted that there are trials underway in the UK aimed at controlling Himalayan Balsam via a rust fungus, although he was unsure of their current progress. If these trials prove successful, the methods could potentially be implemented on a wider scale across Scotland.

Bird Count: Mr Miller reported that bird counts are consistent with previous years. Mr Walters added that the presence of a large group of goosanders can significantly influence the results, particularly depending on their timing and location—most notably at Bridge of Marnoch.

Regarding licensing, Mr Walters noted that authorities are increasingly requesting evidence of alternative deterrent methods being employed. These may include activities such as walking a dog or using a gas gun. He asked to be informed of any such measures so that it can be demonstrated that other approaches continue to be deployed.

Rod Catch: Mr Allwood enquired about the salmon-to-grilse ratio, noting it appears to be approximately 2:1. Mr Walters confirmed that this ratio aligns with the rod catch data, though it is uncertain how accurate this is. Mr Allwood questioned whether this is the typical ratio expected and suggested the possibility that some fish may have remained at sea for longer periods.

Mr Allwood also reflected on the impact of the 2018 drought, describing it as a disastrous year, with ongoing recovery efforts since then.

It was further noted that the rod catch last year, as well as the fish observed earlier in the season, were in excellent condition—markedly better than in previous years. This was attributed to favourable water levels throughout the season, including a relatively wet winter. Consistently high-water levels likely allowed fish to migrate from the ocean with fewer interruptions.

Banff Bridge: As noted above in earlier section.

Health and Safety

A recent review was carried out by **Greens of Haddington**. The Trust received a positive report, along with a set of recommendations. These will be reviewed in detail, and appropriate changes will be implemented as necessary.

Presentation By Mr Walters

Mr Walters, The River Operations Manager gave a presentation on the Deveron ARIS Counter.

Mr Higgins enquired whether the fish counter had recently been serviced. **Mr Walters** responded that advice from the manufacturer indicated the equipment is still in good working condition and should remain operational for at least another year. A full service is scheduled, with the counter due to be removed from the river in **November 2025** and sent to **Seattle** in **December** for maintenance.

Mr Higgins noted the ability to collect data throughout the winter period. **Mr Walters** explained in the first year of operation, the counter was still installed on a temporary structure and had to be removed early due to the risk of flood damage. Consequently, no winter data was captured during that initial phase.

In contrast, during the 2024 season, the counter remained in place until approximately 20th November, providing data well into the late autumn. However, it was not reinstalled until the end of February 2025, creating a gap in monitoring during part of the winter. Mr Walters explained that the long-term objective is to extend the deployment period of the counter in future years—ideally leaving it in place for the full winter season—to gain a better understanding of fish movements and migrations occurring outside the traditional angling season.

This extended data collection is expected to provide valuable insights into winter activity patterns and contribute to a more complete picture of fish movement in the river.

Mr Allwood revisited the topic of the AI monitoring tool and asked **Mr Walters** whether its implementation is expected to ease some of his workload in the upcoming season. **Mr Walters** responded that he is cautiously optimistic the system will reduce the need for time-intensive manual fish counting. However, he emphasised that, at this early stage, he anticipates a considerable portion of his time this season will be spent managing the AI tool—reviewing footage, verifying results, and ensuring accuracy through manual cross-checking.

He also highlighted the legacy fund provided by the Atlantic Salmon Trust (AST), which is specifically earmarked to support the training and development of a new staff member. The intention is for this individual to take on some responsibility for operating and maintaining the system over the next 12 months.

Mr Shields raised concerns about the apparent decline in insect life and questioned whether sufficient monitoring is being carried out on synthetic pyrethroids.

Mr Walters responded that an initial meeting had taken place with a veterinary medicine specialist to explore the possibility of developing a project focused on the chemicals used in sheep treatments for ticks, which belong to the same group of compounds. However, it was concluded that the project would be logistically very challenging and not currently feasible. He noted that detecting these substances in water samples is particularly difficult, adding to the complexity of effective monitoring.

General discussion took place during the presentation, particularly in relation to the graphs and data presented.

Meeting closed at 2:15pm Mr Allwood thanked everyone for attending

Next meeting – Thurs 26th June 2025 at The Bank Café, Huntly.

Action Table:

<u>Action</u>	<u>Lead Person</u>	<u>Completed (Y/N)</u>
Take action to recover outstanding board levy assessments.	Andrew Allwood	
Recruit and Train additional Volunteer River Bailiffs.	Richie Miller	
Alert BMF group of next PA1&PA6 pesticide training course.	Lewis Barr	
Send Fish Photography Guidelines to Beats and add to website & Social media.	Richie Miller	
Book stand at Turriff Show.	Richie Miller	