

**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 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2025 at The Bank Cafe, Huntly.**  
**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), Gordon Morison (B), Rory Cooper (B & T), Robert Shields (B & T), Andrew Higgins (B), Richard Breakell (B), Steve Mackison (T)**

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

Members of the public- Carl Malpass, Sarah Cruickshank, Edward Allwood.

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

**Chairman:** Mr Andrew Allwood

**Apologies for Absence & Welcome** Jim Cruickshank (B&T), Frank Henderson (B & T) (Turriff Angling Association & Turriff Community), Alfie Cheyne (B), Matthew Marsden (B), Robert Copland (B), David Borthwick (B), Jamie Gordon (Project Deveron Catchment Restoration Manager).

**Minutes of Meeting on 5<sup>th</sup> September 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](http://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 25<sup>th</sup> September 2025 as applicable to the Board. No complaints against the Board had been received by the Clerk since the last meeting.

**Update on Financial Matters** The Board remain financially secure, though budgeting remains tight. A long-standing issue regarding unpaid proprietor assessments was discussed. Mr. Shaw owed £1,734 covering four years of arrears. Due to his continued lack of engagement, the matter has been formally escalated to solicitors Grant Smith Law Practice, Turriff, who have initiated small-claims procedures. Members agreed this was now a financial matter that sadly requires legal resolution.

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

#### **River Deveron Conservation Code 2026**

The Board reviewed the Conservation Code for the 2026 season, focusing primarily on the trout-retention guidance. Members reaffirmed that the recommended minimum size for killing trout should remain at 10 inches, and that this requirement must be clearly communicated to all proprietors in a pre-season letter.

Concerns were raised that the current appearance and layout of the Conservation Code were not visually appealing, too text-heavy, and lacked the clarity needed for both visiting anglers and beat owners. Several members felt that the existing design could be misunderstood or overlooked because it does not present key conservation messages in a prominent, engaging way. The group discussed the need to redesign the Conservation Code so it is more attractive, modern, and accessible.

It was agreed by all members to retain the current angling code as is for the next season.

#### **AOCB – Surveillance Cameras**

Poaching activity was reviewed, with levels similar to those observed in recent years, though several members commented that incidents tended to occur when beats were unstaffed or during periods of low visibility. A significant issue raised during the discussion was the declining reliability of the river's camera surveillance network, which had been installed to support enforcement efforts. Multiple devices had stopped transmitting images in real time, and others had failed entirely, leaving only partial or outdated coverage of key access points and known poaching locations.

The Board agreed that a review of the entire surveillance system was now essential.

#### **AOCB – Beaver Plan**

Discussions were had about Beavers entering the Devedon River Catchment, noting that although beavers are not currently present in the Deveron catchment, future expansion is highly possible due to ongoing translocations and natural range spread. Members agreed that the Trust should maintain an active understanding of national policy, potential ecological impacts, and mitigation obligations, particularly regarding fish passage, floodplain function, agricultural land, and riparian woodland.

The Trust recognised that early awareness and planning would be essential should beavers appear within the system, and that clear communication channels will be needed with both landowners and regulatory bodies to ensure constructive management.

The topic will be kept under review.

**AOCB – Future Board Meeting Dates**

Mrs Roebuck to e-mail members with dates for 2026.

Board Meeting Dates for 2026:

Thursday 26<sup>th</sup> March - 12pm

Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> June - 12pm

**Thursday 24<sup>th</sup> Sept - 3:30 pm & 5pm AGM**

Wednesday 2<sup>nd</sup> Dec - 12pm

*The meeting then focused on Trust Business.*

**Update on financial matters**

Mr Cooper reported that overall, finances remain stable, supported by successful fundraising and controlled expenditure across core activities.

Mrs Roebuck reported the investment fund is now valued at £174,393.64, representing an increase since October, when it stood at just over £170,167.19. Members welcomed this improvement, noting that the fund's performance remains positive despite wider market fluctuations.

**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**).

**Water Quality Monitoring:** A significant development in this regard is the planned acquisition of SONDE water-quality monitoring stations, which would allow the Trust to record continuous, real-time data on pH, temperature, turbidity, dissolved oxygen, conductivity, and nutrient levels. These units represent a major upgrade from the Trust's current reliance on spot sampling and observational assessments. However, securing the SONDE units requires substantial funding, and the Trust has already submitted applications to external funders to cover these costs. Additional funding requests have been made to project partners, and the Trust continues to explore opportunities to secure the necessary investment.

It was recognised that obtaining SONDE equipment would significantly enhance the Trust's capacity to detect pollution events quickly, identify trends, and support evidence-based engagement with land managers and regulatory bodies.

The Trust continued river-wide water quality assessments, addressing issues related to diffuse pollution, livestock impacts, and sediment movement.

**Water Scarcity and Water Temperatures:** The catchment experienced extreme hydrological stress, spending 130 days below Q95 flows. Several areas failed to recover even after rainfall returned. Habitat constriction and thermal pressures were widespread, reinforcing the need for long-term resilience planning and expanded monitoring.

Conditions towards the end of the season improved.

**Bird Counts and Licence:** Mr Allwood noted that the number of birds permitted under the Nature Scot licence appears to be decreasing, despite consistent efforts to carry out monthly counts and follow all licence conditions. It was suggested that the group should demonstrate additional non-lethal deterrent measures throughout the year so regulators can see that multiple methods are being deployed in order to actively implement a wider programme of bird management.

Mr Allwood proposed creating a small, supplementary programme of routine scaring and displacement work to accompany, or occur around the same time as, the monthly bird counts. Mr Walters added, these activities could include hanging reflective objects, using scarecrows, or deploying other scaring devices. Although many of these methods were likely already happening informally, members agreed that they needed to be more organised and properly documented.

There was also discussion about scheduling specific scaring days on different beats, separate from the organised bird count day. The importance of recording sightings and deterrent activities accurately was emphasised. Mr Shields recommended the potential use of the EpiCollect app, which is currently used by the Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust for wader monitoring. Mr Shields felt it could be adapted for river use, allowing individuals to enter records from their phones or upload them later.

Furthermore, even informal reports, such as messages posted to the group WhatsApp chat when large numbers of birds were seen, would be valuable. These observations could later be compiled into formal reports, and any photos or videos—however difficult to obtain—would only enhance the supporting evidence provided to regulators.

**Glenkeith Weir Passage:** Design development by Chivas and Fishtek continues. The Trust participates in review meetings, ensuring biological and hydraulic considerations are addressed. Plans will be submitted to Moray Council, and construction is anticipated for summer.

**Project Deveron — ARIS Sonar:** The unit was removed on 10 November and sent to Sound Metrics in Seattle for its first full manufacturer service, which is funded by the Scottish Government. Once returned, the Trust intends to reinstall the counter as soon as river levels permit, with the objective of collecting a full, uninterrupted annual dataset rather than the partial seasons recorded in previous years.

During the summer's prolonged low-water conditions, it was observed that shallower depths caused image distortion and reduced beam clarity. This prompted discussion about trialling alternative ARIS lenses, particularly a narrow 3-degree lens, which may perform better in shallow water by reducing beam spread and improving target definition. The group agreed that testing

different lenses would help optimise performance under varying flow conditions and ensure the highest possible data quality.

**Funding:** It was reported that a £10,000 grant had been secured from the Fishmongers' Company of London, which will enable the recruitment of a full-time staff member dedicated to agricultural engagement. This post is intended to support regular contact with farmers and assist in identifying environmental improvements that will benefit both agricultural operations and the wider river system.

Members were advised that the Trust is awaiting the outcome of its application to the Swire Foundation, with a decision anticipated early in the new year. If successful, this funding would significantly enhance the Trust's capacity to deliver catchment-scale projects. The Trust has also applied for funding to purchase additional monitoring equipment priced at £36,000 for five units.

A further update was provided on the proposal to digitally map the entire catchment. Jamie has successfully progressed through the first stage of the application process. If funded, the project will produce a comprehensive high-resolution satellite-derived audit of the catchment, enabling detailed assessment of pressures and the identification of priority areas for intervention. The system would also allow water-flow models to be overlaid onto the digital maps, supporting the identification of diffuse pollution pathways and land-use impacts.

**Research and Monitoring (Revised):** Mr Miller confirmed that they had acquired 30 high-specification temperature loggers and would begin deploying them soon. The loggers would help them monitor thermal pressure throughout the catchment, which was especially important after the extremely low-flow, high-temperature conditions experienced during the previous summer.

They had also completed a full eDNA sampling programme across the river. The results would help highlight whether certain species were present or absent in various tributaries.

**Beauly–Blackhillock–New Deer–Peterhead 400kV OHL:** The Trust monitored the proposed 400kV overhead line development, noting its proximity to significant watercourses and the confusion created by overlapping planning lines. Ongoing engagement will be required to safeguard river habitats.

**Banff Bridge Scour Protection:** The Trust continued to monitor discussions around scour protection works at Banff Bridge, ensuring that infrastructure works do not compromise fish passage or habitat stability.

**Rod Catch 2025:** The Trust noted the poorest rod catch on record, attributed to severe low-flow conditions restricting angling effort. Lower river beats performed slightly better later in the season. The Trust cannot complete the final monthly updates for the board and government without Montcoffer's figures.

**Morison Trophy 2025 & River Opening 2026:** The Morrison Trophy was awarded to Ronald Ewen for a 21lb salmon caught at Moncoffer.

Plans for the 2026 river opening include BBC's Ann McAlpine presenting the trophy and Scot McKenzie performing the ceremonial opening.

**The Rivers Trust Membership:** Membership of The Rivers Trust has proven highly beneficial, providing access to valuable networks and funding opportunities. The Trust's engagement with the Fishmongers' Company and Swire Foundation arose directly from this membership.

**Pink Salmon Monitoring:** Despite this being an odd year—when higher numbers might typically occur—initial results indicated little or no detection of pink salmon. Continued monitoring will remain essential to detect any future incursions.

**2026 Work Plan**

The 2026 work plan was outlined and is available on request.

**Health and Safety**

Three staff members completed Bluecrest medicals following advice from the H&S consultant. Fieldwork continues under established health and safety protocols.

**Meeting closed**

Mr. Allwood thanked all those who attended and closed the meeting at 2:00pm. The next board meeting is on the 26<sup>th</sup> March 2026 at 12pm.