

**MINUTES of THE COMBINED ANNUAL MEETING of QUALIFIED PROPRIETORS of
THE RIVER DEVERON DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD and ANNUAL PUBLIC OPEN MEETING
held at THE BANFF SPRINGS HOTEL, BANFF on Thursday, 24th SEPTEMBER 2026 at 5pm**

Present:	Andrew Allwood (Muirsek), Jim Cruickshank (Carnousie, Ardmiddle, Inverkeithny Glebe, Inverkeithny, Upper Netherdale, Lower Netherdale, Laithers Estate), Mr B Copland (Banff and Macduff Angling Association), Gordon Morison (Bognie), Conner Morison (Mountblairy), Rory Cooper , R Shields (Avochie), S Mackison . S Cruickshank (Deveronside Fishings). Also in attendance: Mrs S Roebuck (Clerk to the Board); R Miller (River Director); M Walters (Associate Director of DBI Trust), Members of the public including members of the Deveron, Bogie and Isla Rivers Charitable Trust, Ghillies, Estate Managers and Anglers. Mr C Malpass
Apologies for Absence:	Mr Cheyne, Mr D Borthwick, Mr M Marsden, Mr Frank Henderson, Mr Richard Breakell, Mr Higgins, Mr and Mrs Burce, Mr M Hay, Mr J Gardiner, Mr A Sharp. Alexandra Stancioff, Louise McLarwn, Ed Gormanley, Ian Traquir, Jacky Player, Jamie Gordon .
Chairman:	Mr Andrew Allwood welcomed Proprietors, Mandatories, Ghillies, Members of the Deveron, Bogie and Isla Rivers Charitable Trust and other members of the public.
Minutes of last Annual Meeting:	Having circulated the minutes in advance for the last meeting held on 25 th September 2025, it was proposed that they be taken as read and were unanimously approved.
2026 Proposed Activities	Mr Cruickshank outlined the principal areas of work proposed for the coming year. Two major priorities were highlighted: progressing the long-running work associated with Glenkeith Weir and developing the agricultural Cluster Group approach. It was explained that this represented a development in the Trust/Board's longer-term strategy, with the intention of concentrating activity initially on two tributary areas, including the Isla and King Edward, to demonstrate best practice on a catchment scale. With support from the Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust and the NFU, the aim would be to work with farmers collectively rather than relying on isolated interventions by individual holdings. Rosa Holt, the new Agro-environmental Adviser, was engaging directly with key farmers and land managers. The intention was to build local support, identify influential participants and encourage as broad a level of cooperation as possible. Members noted that meaningful improvements in water quality, flow and habitat would require coordinated action across neighbouring holdings. The importance of establishing measurable baselines was also stressed. Existing and developing monitoring tools included river-temperature loggers, water-quality monitoring, eDNA, invertebrate monitoring, fish counts and catch data. These would allow the organisation to assess whether interventions were producing measurable change over time and, if successful, provide a model capable of being extended elsewhere in the Deveron catchment and potentially to other river systems.

Annual Report & Accounts:

Members were also advised that Sarah Cruickshank had agreed to become a member of the Board.

The Annual Report and Accounts had been circulated. The Chairman advised that the accounts were in order and had been signed. The report reflected the substantial range of work undertaken during the year and the positive programme planned for the year ahead.

Particular reference was made to the engineering works at Banff Bridge. The works were described as substantial and well executed, with good liaison between the contractors, Aberdeenshire Council and the river interests. Members noted that the design and implementation had proceeded without significant problems and that no interruption to fish passage had been identified. The technically difficult work in the river, including installation and joining of the protective mattress around the bridge structure, was acknowledged. The Chairman recorded his appreciation of the standard of the works and expressed the hope that the measures would provide a long-term solution.

Presentation by Mr Marcus Walters

Mr Walters provided an overview of the work undertaken by the Board and Trust during the year and the principal projects currently underway.

He outlined the expanded staff team and summarised the Trust's core work, including bailiffing, liaison with Police Scotland and wildlife-crime officers, monitoring of river and infrastructure works, fish rescues, predator management and invasive non-native species control. New technology, including wildlife cameras, infrared/night-vision equipment and a drone, was helping staff make more effective use of available resources.

The exceptionally low summer flows and high water temperatures experienced during 2026 were highlighted, together with concerns regarding their impact on fish and fishing conditions. Predator management continued, with bird-count surveys supporting the NatureScot licence and evidence of non-lethal deterrent measures also being required.

Invasive-species work continued across the catchment with substantial volunteer support. Giant hogweed, Himalayan balsam and Japanese knotweed remained priorities, while mink trapping continued and approximately eight mink were understood to have been caught on the Deveron. A trial using Himalayan balsam rust fungus was also underway. Progress had been made with Network Rail regarding invasive-species control along railway land.

Mr Walters then provided an update on **Project Deveron and fish monitoring**. The ARIS counter had completed three full seasons to 2025, with AI-assisted processing producing an estimated count of just over 6,000 fish in 2025. This demonstrated the value of the counter during a year when the rod-and-line catch had been exceptionally low due in part to difficult warm and low-water conditions.

PIT-tag monitoring was also progressing, with approximately 2,000 parr tagged annually in the upper catchment. Funding had been secured for an additional lower-river detection array, which would improve understanding of smolt survival through the catchment. One tagged fish had been tracked from parr in 2024, through its smolt migration in 2025, and subsequently detected returning as an adult in August 2026.

Thirty temperature loggers had been deployed throughout the catchment, while volunteer invertebrate monitoring was providing further information on water quality and environmental pressures. Early temperature data had recorded periods above 20°C at a lower-river site.

An update was provided on habitat restoration and environmental monitoring, including practical river-restoration work, eDNA sampling and encouraging indications of freshwater pearl mussel at several locations. Further work was underway to investigate these results.

Current and proposed restoration projects included floodplain and meander reconnection in the upper Isla, development of a more comprehensive water-quality monitoring programme for the King Edward and Isla, potential removal of the deteriorating Glenkeith Weir, tributary tree planting, improvements to fish passage at a culvert and habitat restoration on Chivas land at Keith. Techniques being considered included tree planting, re-meandering, floodplain reconnection, leaky dams and large woody material.

Mr Walters also updated members on agricultural engagement. Rosa Holt had completed six initial farm visits, principally within the King Edward area, with further visits planned. The approach was to work collaboratively with farmers to identify measures benefiting both individual farms and the river, including access to environmental funding. The longer-term objective was to develop a more formal farmer cluster.

Finally, Mr Walters highlighted the importance of the Board's annual contribution of approximately £31,500 to the Trust. This core funding helped attract substantially greater external project and grant income, with total Trust income of approximately £450,000. It was estimated that every £1 contributed by the Board helped generate approximately £13 in wider income. Project Deveron had also received recognition at the Environmental Monitoring and Measurement Achievement Awards, while the River Within project had been shortlisted for the Nature of Scotland Awards.

Thanks were recorded to staff, volunteers, supporting estates and families, auction donors and attendees, funders, sponsors and the wider Deveron community.

Questions and Discussion

Following the presentation, members raised a number of questions:

Predator licensing: A member asked whether NatureScot appeared to be becoming more sympathetic towards control of Goosanders or whether improved information being supplied by the Trust had influenced licence numbers. Mr Walters advised that the system remained relatively rigid, with licence numbers largely calculated from maximum bird counts. Although evidence on the number of juvenile salmonids consumed by Goosanders was included in applications, there remained uncertainty over the wider Goosander population and movement between river systems. Stronger population evidence would therefore be required before significant changes to the licensing approach were likely.

Temperature monitoring: Members asked whether the temperature data showed a time lag between changes in the upper and lower river. Mr Walters advised that the monitoring programme was still too new to establish this, but sufficient data should eventually allow these relationships to be examined. He noted that shallow, exposed upland streams could warm particularly quickly and that sharp changes in temperature, particularly during spring, could place fish under considerable stress and contribute to fungal outbreaks.

Freshwater pearl mussel/eDNA: Members asked whether a positive eDNA result indicated that a freshwater pearl mussel was alive and how long DNA remained detectable in the water. Mr Walters explained that an old shell

would not normally result in a positive detection, although a recently dead mussel could potentially do so. False positives were considered uncommon, although false negatives were possible depending on where and when samples were collected. Flow conditions could also affect the concentration and movement of DNA within the river.

Restoration techniques: Members asked whether leaky dams and large woody material would form part of future restoration work. Mr Walters confirmed that these were among the techniques that could be used where appropriate, alongside tree planting, willow planting, re-meandering and floodplain reconnection. The objective was to improve habitat and retain water within the catchment while ensuring that surrounding land and infrastructure were protected.

Information for farmers: A member suggested producing a short leaflet that Rosa Holt could provide to farmers, explaining the practical restoration measures available and the benefits to both the farm and river. Mr Walters agreed that this would be a useful way of supporting discussions with land managers.

Use of AI with the ARIS counter: Members asked how successful the AI system had been and what further improvements could be made. Mr Walters advised that further funding had been secured to develop the system. Improvements were still required in usability and in processing difficult footage, particularly during very low water when fish tracks could become fragmented. Manual checking would therefore continue, and the Trust was also considering comparison with other AI systems being developed elsewhere.

Additional underwater camera: The possibility of installing a conventional underwater camera alongside the ARIS counter was discussed. This could provide useful visual information to support species identification and interpretation of movements recorded by the ARIS system, including smolt and eel movements.

Thanks: Mr Allwood thanked Mr Walters for the comprehensive presentation and thanked everyone for attending and for their continued support of the Board, Trust and river.

Meeting closed: The combined annual public meeting concluded at 6.45pm, followed by refreshments.

Action Plan:

DBI Trust: Consider producing a short information leaflet for farmers outlining practical restoration measures and benefits to farms and the river.

Mr Walters: Consider the potential use of a conventional underwater camera alongside the ARIS counter to support species identification and interpretation