

**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 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2020 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), Matthew Marsden (B), Robert Copland (B), Robert Shields (B & T), Rory Cooper (B & T)**

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), **Karen Muller** (Project Officer)

**{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)

Mr Allwood welcomed Mr Robert Copland.

**Minutes of Meeting on 10<sup>th</sup> September 2020** 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 10<sup>th</sup> September 2020 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 30<sup>th</sup> September had been circulated and the ones for December will be issued in January. Mrs Roebuck informed the Board that five Board assessments were outstanding, totalling £4,127.50. It was explained that copious reminders were sent, and proprietors were also contacted by phone. The Chairman to investigate further action. 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. Furthermore, a brief overview was given by Mrs Roebuck of the original projected Trust budget against a reviewed budget. The valuation of the Trust investment held by McInroy and Wood was £136,860.21.

**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**).

**Morison Trophy**- Awarded to Mr McDonald, caught at Forglen and weighing an estimated 35lbs. The awarding of the trophy is yet to be decided due to COVID-19 restrictions.

**Crayfish Sighting and Investigation** – This project involved the investigation into a potential cray fish sighting, spotted in the river end of October. Protocols from our Biosecurity plan was followed, and the required licenses were applied for to carry out investigations. The traps were deployed from 3<sup>rd</sup> November to 30<sup>th</sup> November, but no cray fish were captured.

Mr Shields enquired about the possibility of underwater cameras equivalent to wildlife cameras that can operate all day round and take photographs when they sense movement. Mr Miller explained that he is not aware of any cost effective, easy deployment cameras but it was worth looking into this for general surveillance.

**Water Quality** – The last sets of results available were from October last year. Since then, two sets of sampling were done. One in July and one in October. The July results are due imminently and October results are due in January. The number of sites were increased, and sampling started right at the top of the catchment to act as a control and to try get above any contamination. Results are being used to guide SEPA both in terms of what monitoring they do and their enforcement and regulations to diffuse pollution in the catchment.

Evidence was also given to Fishery Management Scotland who have been writing a paper on raising concerns with regards to SEPA and how they are fulfilling their regulatory role.

Mr Walters reported that the control sample was taken from the Church in the Cabrach. Mr Shields explained there is still a lot of forestry above the sample site in the Cabrach and thought sampling may need to be from a higher point still. Mr Walters explained that it has been an ongoing challenge, but he is awaiting results to see if any contamination is detected.

Mr Walters suggested to work with JHI and come up with an agreement about how much the Trust should continue doing this water monitoring. The Trust have now done a good job at raising the issue and raising concerns and need to decide whether it is their responsibility to continue. The Trust is waiting on two sets of results to come from JHI and Mr Walters has agreed to have discussions with them after the results come in, to determine whether the Trust continue the water monitoring or use it as evidence to compel SEPA for better monitoring. As part of that discussion Mr Walters has now got a spreadsheet with all the data points and all the sampling SEPA have carried out since 2014. From that Mr Walters will have a better idea of where SEPA are sampling, how often they are sampling and what they are sampling for. Expert advice from Buglife may be required but it will help inform the Trust to determine whether to keep on this sampling or whether enough has been done to highlight the issue and hand over to SEPA.

Mr Cruickshank has asked Mr Walters to investigate the SEPA report, focusing on the graphs that look at the possible impact of invertebrates for a bit more clarity.

**River Works** – There is an ongoing SEPA license for sediment works in the Isla catchment, downstream of Keith. The license has caused concerns for numerous years and questions were raised about what it allows the farmers to do. When it was initially implemented it was highly regulated by SEPA but with SEPA overall reducing the number of staff, their regulations of this license have reduced and there has been less input towards it. These concerns have been raised locally with SEPA and information has been given to Fishery Management Scotland to include in their review of SEPA fulfilling their regulatory role.

Mr Walters explained that the objective of this licence was to make sure the tributaries and drains are functioning properly. The farmers can move sediments from the bottom end of tributaries and drains where they come into the river. They are permitted to move sand bars along the river if they are not going below the surface of the water and make sure there is less lateral movement of the river eroding banks. Farmers should not be creating any high flood banks whilst doing this. However, that is one of the things being observed as flood banks have been built up in places. Mr Shields emphasised this is a big issue, and the impact of these banks are quite severe.

**Bird License** – A license has been granted and the agents have been nominated. The license is reduced this year based on reduced counts last year. Counts are now being conducted monthly through the winter rather than the two that were previously conducted in March and April. This is to try get a better understanding of the number of birds that are present throughout the winter. Mr Walters expressed that these counts will not be able to be fed into the license for another couple of years.

It is a condition of the license, to report any additional scaring methods deployed. Scaring options and how to report additional scaring can be found on the written report (**Available on request**).

Mr Cruickshank expressed that it is possible that birds are just being moved along to other areas higher up the river or up some of the tributaries. Mr Walters explained that counting starts at Huntly Castle and is unsure if birds are being displaced. There is a logistical challenge to cover the whole catchment and very reliant on beats coming forward and offering what they can do further upstream. Mr Cruickshank suggested visiting one off half mile stretches to see if the birds have disappeared or are elsewhere in the catchment.

Mr Walters proposed that a bird scaring group is expanded on “Whatsapp” and have volunteers report in when birds are seen.

**Smolt Tagging** – This year’s work was cancelled for the Dorenell windfarm monitoring but has been deferred to next year.

The Board has put in a bid for a Scottish Government contract to tag as part of a five river project. The Trust would be doing 60 tags as part of that on the Deveron. These will all be tagged using new higher frequency, but they are predator tags and change signal if they are eaten.

Mr Cooper questioned if transmitters will still need to be located to pick up the change in tone. Mr Walters explained that this is one of the problems with this technology and if anything takes it out of the river it is difficult to find. Radio tags used in 2017 allowed for signal to travel through the air. Mr Walters agreed there are some limitations but expressed it would be a useful contract if the Trust are successful in securing it.

**Electrofishing** – Only 10 NEPS sites were conducted as there was no funding from the government for the full 30 National Electrofishing Program sites. In addition, the Trust did monitor for Dorenell and did some timed sites on the main stem to look for salmon fry. Mr Walters collated all the information together and gave a summary on what was found for each tributary.

Mr Henderson enquired if any Adult trout are found during these juvenile surveys. Mr Walters explained they do not target specific adult habitat and very rarely catch adult trout anywhere whilst doing electrofishing surveys due to the low water areas targeted.

**Lower Tributaries Project – Update** The Trust is working on the Turriff Burn with the community council to determine the land ownership so they can plan remedial measures. Mr Miller explained that the report done by the Wild Trout Trust is being used as a basis along with some of their own ideas. Mr Miller reported that there are some issues with the lower end of the Turriff Burn and that a flood has washed away a section of bank and half of the flow is going through a man-made stream called the Gassy Burn, down through the Turriff show ground and back into the Turriff burn mainstream. The Turriff Show ground committee are trying to redirect the flow back down the Turriff Burn and return the Gassy Burn to the way it used to be. The Trust will help as best they can to resolve this.

Mr Miller obtained a quote from Trex Ecology for a walkover habitat survey and assessment for the King Edward burn and its two main tributaries. Mr Miller explained that the quote was for £6,585 and felt the report would be useful to hand to funding partners. Mr Miller also suggested withdrawing funds from the restoration fund held at McInroy and Wood to fund the project.

Mr Cruickshank expressed that given the improvement and stability of the organisation over the last 6 months he felt comfortable that it is a worthwhile project and that funding should be made available.

Mr Allwood suggested Trust staff attending some of the survey to adopt the techniques used. This would allow the Trust to do the work themselves on any other tributaries.

Mr Cooper added that a cable is being brought ashore into Sandend from the Moray Offshore Windfarm and that they may have a budget to donate to local organisations. Mr Walters explained the windfarm cable would be from the Moray West Windfarm. The Moray East Windfarm is already being constructed and the cable comes ashore at Boyndie. Mr Walters agreed there might be potential funding from both Moray East and Moray West windfarms and that the Trust will look into it.

All members agreed that in absence of any other funding the Trust can go ahead and fund this project on the King Edward burn using the funds held at McInroy and Wood.

**Rod Catch** – There was a general discussion on the rod catch figures for 2020.

## **River Deveron Conservation Code**

The projected categorisation from the Scottish government for the Deveron for 2021 is a Category 2.

Mr Miller suggested that the Angling Code 2021 should remain the same as the previous year but wanted to raise the use of multi hook lures. If a fish is hooked on a 2 / 3 hook lure, then it can be hard to release safely and it exposes the fish to air which is highly detrimental to survival. This is already noted at the bottom

of the code but wanted to emphasise that the need for beats to enforce this board recommendation.

Mr Cooper suggested that anglers are encouraged to play fish quickly and hard so that it can be released quickly. Mr Miller agreed to redistribute a step-by-step guide to catch and release created by Mr Robert McConnell along with the Angling Code 2021.

Mr Cruickshank added the manner of releasing fish is important and some anglers are better than others. Mr Miller emphasised the importance of reducing the fish to exposure to air, and that this has been proven plenty of times through research to be key to a safe release.

The 2021 code and guidance on releasing fish safely will be circulated to proprietors early in the new year.

**2021 Work Plan and staffing Requirements**

Mr Miller reported that plans are in place for tagging staff and unless matters change, himself and Mr Walters would manage the fishery protection patrols and no additional help would be required.

Mr Cruickshank and Mr Allwood felt encouraged but re-assured Mr Miller that if workload were overwhelming the Board could investigate funding additional help.

**AOCB**

Mr Marsden informed members that there is change in the structure of the farming payment and wanted to know if there is an opportunity to lobby the minister in parliament to make sure their next draft encourages farmers to increase their buffers around river and water courses to stop run off.

Mr Allwood suggested this is discussed further at the April meeting once Brexit deals have taken place.

**AOCB – Himalayan Balsam Invasion**

A communication was received from Mr Morison regarding Himalayan Balsam Invasion explaining that there is discussion to not be pressing so hard on the invasive species because it is a great contribution to insect life and food especially for bees.

Mr Miller has acknowledged this and explained the Trust will review this but aim to get the native riparian vegetation back and hopefully provide for the bees that way.

Mr Allwood suggested that the guidance that has been written is enhanced to explain there is hope for bees in other directions. Mr Miller will discuss with Miss Muller about adding further text onto the beat guidance.

Miss Muller added that a full eradication is never going to happen but getting it down to a density where it is not going to end up in a monoculture and where it has less negative impact but still some positive impact for pollinators, is something to aim for. What is needed on the riverbank is a large variety of plants that can flower throughout the season so there is no boom-and-bust scenario.

**AOCB – 2021 Meeting dates:**

Dates are now confirmed as:  
Thurs 8th April, Thurs 8<sup>th</sup> July, Thurs 9<sup>th</sup> Sep (AGM), Wed 1<sup>st</sup> Dec.

**Meeting closed at 2.00pm**

Mr Allwood thanked everyone for attending.  
Next meeting – Thurs 8<sup>th</sup> April, 12 noon, Castle Hotel.  
**\*This may change due to COVID-19 restrictions\***

## Action Plan

<u>Action</u>	<u>Responsible</u>	<u>Deadline</u>	<u>Completed</u>	<u>Result</u>
Update "Whatsapp" group for reporting birds and investigate upper river / trib. populations.	MW			
Look for a possible contact from Moray Offshore Windfarm for possible donation/funding for the King Edward Burn Restoration Project.	MW/RM			
Look into additional underwater cameras.	RM			
Look into SEPA'S report for more clarity and plan for future strategy. (Water Quality)	MW			
Distribute 2021 code and guidance on catch and release.	SR/RM			
Add additional text to HB guidance.	KM			
Commission Trex Ecology for KE Burn survey and report.	RM			