

**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 4<sup>th</sup> December 2024 at Avochie House, 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:** **Jim Cruickshank** (B&T), **Andrew Allwood** (B), **Gordon Morison** (B), **Rory Cooper** (B & T), **Frank Henderson** (B & T) (Turriff Angling Association & Turriff Community), **Alfie Cheyne** (B).

In attendance- **Mrs S Roebuck** (Clerk to Board and Administrator of DBI Trust); **Marcus Walters** (DBI Trust); **Jamie Gordon** (Project Deveron Catchment Restoration Manager).

Members of the public- Carl Malpass, Sarah Cruickshank.

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

**Chairman:** Mr Andrew Allwood

**Apologies for Absence & Welcome** Matthew Marsden (B), Robert Copland (B), Robert Shields (B & T), Andrew Higgins (B), David Borthwick (B & T), Richard Breakell (B), Richie Miller (B and representative of DBI Trust)

**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 5<sup>th</sup> September 2024 as applicable to the Board. No complaints against the Board had been received by the Clerk since the last meeting.

**Appoint New Board Member** A vacancy arose on the Board, and Mr. Alfie Cheyne of Mayen Estate had previously expressed an interest in joining the Board. The Board was delighted and at this meeting Mr. Cheyne was appointed as a fellow board member.

1<sup>st</sup> Proposer : Mr Jim Cruickshank

2<sup>nd</sup> Proposer : Mr Gordon Morison

Mr Cheyne expressed his thanks. The Board welcomes Mr. Cheyne's enthusiasm in our efforts and future plans.

**Update on Financial Matters**

Mrs Roebuck reported the last quarterly accounts to 30th September had been circulated and the accounts for December will be issued in January.

Mrs. Roebuck informed the Board that two Board assessments, totalling £3,553.50, remain outstanding. She explained that reminders had been sent, particularly to Mr. Shaw, who has several years of unpaid assessments. A recorded delivery letter was sent to Mr. Shaw, stating that if payment is not made, the Board will initiate small claims proceedings to resolve the matter.

Mr. Morison believed that Mr. Shaw's beat was listed incorrectly and not called Lower Mountblairy. Mrs. Roebuck clarified that it is listed as Lower Mountblairy (Part) on the valuation role for the Banff and Buchan area.

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

**River Deveron Conservation Code 2024**

The proposed 2025 River Grading remains at Category 2.

All members agreed that the Conservation Code was thoroughly discussed last year in great detail. Mr. Malpass believes that everyone now has a clear understanding of it. While there were previous questions from anglers and some grey areas, the code appears to have addressed those concerns, and there have been no complaints since.

Mr Allwood explained that the return rate was 99% for salmon, sea trout and brown trout, which is impressive and better than the year before (97%) and therefore the message has been heeded.

Mr. Walters emphasised the importance of ensuring the message about properly returning fish is being communicated effectively.

Miss Cruickshank suggested that more information on fish handling should be included. She noted that there have been comments on some photos shared on social media, and that increased awareness on the topic would be beneficial.

Mr. Morison proposed adding information at the bottom of the code. Mr. Allwood explained that the Angling Code is already quite long, and adding more information could discourage the public from reading it. Instead, Mr. Morison suggested including a photograph demonstrating proper fish handling. In response, Mr. Allwood recommended using online videos as an alternative.

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

**AOCB – Future Board Meeting Dates**

Mrs Roebuck to e-mail members with dates for 2025.

Board Meeting Dates for 2025:

Thursday 27<sup>th</sup> March - 12pm

Thursday 26<sup>th</sup> June - 12pm  
**Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> Sept - 3:30 pm & 5pm AGM**  
Wednesday 3rd Dec - 12pm

*The meeting then focused on Trust Business.*

**Update on financial matters**

Mr. Cruickshank informed the board members that the budget is reviewed on a monthly basis. He explained that the Trust initially projected a deficit of £33k but was confident that this would improve over the course of the year. The auction night significantly boosted the budget figures and has helped eliminate this deficit. Additionally, Mr. Cruickshank noted that some income was accidentally omitted from the initial budget and additional income from contracts had been secured. With this correction, the Trust is now projected to end the year with a surplus.

Mr. Cheyne asked about the income generated from the gin and whether it is profitable. Mr. Allwood explained that while a significant amount of effort goes into it, the profit margins are relatively small given the work involved. He suggested that the gin is not being marketed effectively.

Mr. Cruickshank pointed out that the gin serves as an excellent way to engage with the broader public.

**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**).

**Scottish Invasive Species Initiative:** Himalayan Balsam – Mr Morison inquired whether Himalayan Balsam would suffocate Giant Hogweed, to which Mr. Walters responded that the hogweed is much taller and capable of growing through it. Mr. Walters also mentioned that in certain areas, there are trials of a rust fungus that could potentially be introduced to control Himalayan balsam, although he would need to gather more information on that. The board also talked about the possibility of strimming the Himalayan Balsam. Mr. Morison expressed that while there has been plenty of advice on managing Giant Hogweed, there are fewer recommendations on how to effectively deal with Balsam and the appropriate timing for such actions. SISI to provide updates to the members.

**Water Quality:** SEPA continues its work on the Deveron and is adding two new catchment officers to the team. They are conducting follow-up visits to farms and have streamlined their internal processes, making it easier to issue fines. Previously, fines had to go through SEPA's legal department, but now officers can issue them directly without going through the original procedure, as Mr. Gordon explained.

Mr. Walters explained that fines could be imposed on individuals who, for example, fail to store their pesticides properly. While he acknowledged that SEPA's actions are a step in the right direction, he believes the current regulations don't fully address the issues that need protection. As a result, he

feels the focus will likely shift toward collaborating with farmers to improve practices beyond the existing regulations.

Mr. Gordon mentioned that SEPA maintains a farming and water website, along with resources designed to provide advice to farmers. Additionally, they have some funding available to support initiatives such as events and training for farmers. It could be beneficial to engage in discussions with them to explore the possibility of organising an event to bring people together and encourage knowledge sharing.

Mr. Cheyne requested regular updates from SEPA on the number of farm visits, follow-up visits, warnings issued, and other related activities. This would provide a means to evaluate whether compliance and related metrics are improving over time.

**Windfarms:** Mr. Morison brought up the issue of Reinstatement Funds required for wind farms, which are intended for the removal of wind farm infrastructure and the restoration of the environment to its original state after the wind farm's lifespan ends. These funds must be securely held in a protected account and are regularly reviewed to ensure they are sufficient. However, he expressed concerns that the funds may not adequately cover or address the environmental impact of removing foundations and roads.

**Seal License:** Mr. Allwood inquired whether the counter device could be configured to send a signal when a large object such as a seal passes it. Mr. Walters explained that this functionality is not currently available, though it could potentially be developed. At present, the data is simply recorded and stored on a hard drive. He noted that this could be a future enhancement.

Mr. Walters also mentioned an ongoing process utilising AI to interpret the data, which, if successful, could enable live data processing. Additionally, he highlighted the possibility of using other technologies, such as a camera developed by a Swedish company that operates in real-time and automatically detects objects.

**Rod Catch:** Mr. Allwood, speaking on behalf of Lord Marnoch, raised a point for consideration over time. He noted the increased number of fish entering river systems this season, regardless of whether they were caught, and inquired whether this could be compared to commercial fishing activity—or lack thereof—during the COVID years. He highlighted that some of the fish being caught were multi-winter fish and mentioned the existence of a website that tracks and records commercial trolling efforts in the North Atlantic.

Mr. Walters responded that in his opinion, while there may be some tracking of trolling, there is no legitimate data for Atlantic salmon. Most of the activity is likely illegal, though this doesn't rule out the possibility that it's happening. He pointed out that there is some evidence of trolling in northern Norway, extending into the Russian sector, with increasing indications of unregulated trolling in the area. However, he acknowledged that gathering enough data to make a definitive connection could be challenging. He also mentioned that some of the larger Atlantic salmon charities are looking into this issue, but whether significant progress can be made is uncertain.

**Centenary Dinner and Charitable Auction:** Mr. Cruickshank wanted to express his thanks to everyone who contributed to making it a success. While many people were involved, he wanted in particular to thank Mr. Shields for his generosity, Mr. Cheyne for his contributions, and the Morison family for their

invaluable assistance and support, not only at the dinner but throughout the centenary year.

**2025 Work Plan**

The 2025 work plan was outlined and is available on request.

**Health and Safety**

A stress risk assessment was recently completed and issued to the team. Companies with 5 or more employees are legally required to have written risk assessments and their staff must be trained accordingly.

**AOCB - Beaulieu  
Peterhead high voltage  
line and Banff Bridge**

Both projects have raised concerns and prompted extensive discussions. The team has been asked to provide detailed reports at the next meeting.

**AOCB - McConnell  
Trophy**

Mr James Murray has been awarded the McConnell Trophy for 2024. Mr Murray has successfully showcased the Deveron to a new and wider audience over the last 3 years and his work on campaigning to protect and save salmon and stop pollution is commendable.

**Meeting closed**

Mr. Allwood thanked all those who attended and closed the meeting at 2:00pm. The next board meeting is on the 27<sup>th</sup> March 2025 at 12pm.