

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 Thursday 8th April 2021 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 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.

Present: **Jim Cruickshank** (B&T), **Andrew Allwood** (B), **Frank Henderson** (B & T) (Turriff Angling Association & Turriff Community), **Richard Breakell** (B), **Matthew Marsden** (B), **Robert Shields** (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), **Dr Marc Stutter** (James Hutton Institute – Guest Speaker)

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

Chairman: Mr Andrew Allwood

Apologies for Absence & Welcome Gordon Morison (B), C Richard Marsden (B), Robert Copland (B), David Borthwick (B & T), Mrs J Player (B), Rory Cooper (B & T)

Mr Allwood welcomed Dr Marc Stutter.

Minutes of Meeting on 2nd Dec 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) and signed by the Chairman of the Meeting.

There were no queries nor matters outstanding.

Aquaculture and Fisheries (Scotland) Act 2013 Mr Cruickshank reported that Laithers Fishing changed hands and the family partnerships has taken over those fishings.
Mr Allwood reported that there were no other changes noted to Board Members Financial Interests since 2nd December 2020 as applicable to the Board. No complaints against the Board had been received by the Clerk since the last meeting.

Talk by Dr Marc Stutter A presentation was given by Dr Marc Stutter from The James Hutton Institute on Water Quality and Riparian Management. The Threats to water quality and improving riparian functions. **A copy of the presentation is available on request from the Clerk.**

Mr Breakell expressed that some fields are ploughed to the river's edge and enquired about grants available to encourage farmers to leave buffer strips. Dr Stutter explained that there is a legal requirement of 2m buffer no cultivation border. Furthermore, a new scheme is starting but Dr Stutter is uncertain how it will work, if it is open grants for the whole country but confirmed that grants are available if applied for.

Mr Cruickshank felt there is a limited amount of money put into the scheme to allow farmers or landowners to get involved and questioned if there is an opportunity to pressurise government to increase the level of funding cover and how best to approach this. Mr Cruickshank expressed how difficult it is to apply for these schemes. It takes an advisor to apply on the farms' behalf and is time consuming. Mr Cruickshank suggested that as an organisation the Board should be more proactive, assuming these points are made and are articulated and there is little action.

Mr Cruickshank enquired on whether the increase in numbers of rural properties with septic tanks and the use of domestic chemicals such as bleach could potentially have an impact on the river. Dr Stutter explained that this has been an area of interest for several years and that septic tanks are a major problem. Having a functioning tank with a sound soil treatment bed and a functioning soak away is a great line of defence, especially the soak away element not pointing directly to streams. This can be helped if a river has more natural processing power in it for example driven by more carbon rich soils in the river corridor or driven by leaf litter thus allowing the temperatures to not be so extreme since it is shaded. Sewage is not straight ditched and moving all contaminants quickly, instead they are slower in passage and are turned over and degraded by some of the natural processes or retained sediments. The things that can make the stream more resilient in the riparian corridor can help some of that processing by things like septic tanks.

Mr Marsden questioned if invasive species such as hogweed have an assistance to the area which cannot be fished, for stopping field run off. Dr Stutter explained if there is bigger vegetation, it adds a certain roughness that does slow run off at the margins of the stream or small river but possibly as a negative aspect, they are so big that they may choke the channel out and are too aggressive. These species are being removed for the habitat aspect and for being so aggressive. It is better to keep controlling that and to have roughness of vegetation and leaf litter from more indigenous vegetation and trees and shrubs.

Mr Miller expressed that the minimum and maximum buffers do not stop certain incidents such as point source pollution incidents and the field drains. He explained the two major pollution incidents on the river Deveron over the past 6 months were straight out of pipes and straight in the river. Mr Miller agreed that septic tanks are a major problem and he also referred to Mr Breakell's comments on farmers ploughing up to the field margin and has asked that if anybody sees areas that do breach the 2m rule, then the Trust would be happy to go and visit the farmer.

Both Mr Miller and Mr Walters expressed to get a catchment wide project you need somebody driving it. It was suggested that funding is sourced to fund an agricultural liaison post or water quality post to go and visit farmers and provide them with ideas and suggestions.

Mr Shields explained that the board did initiate to offer to pay the fee for drawing up a riparian plan and has suggested that the Board can persuade government that they are the people that have the expertise to be able to put these riparian plans in place. Mr Allwood expressed that this is an opportunity and that the board ought to be discussing that possibly. Mr Allwood would like to discuss this further on this next meeting to allow time to find out a bit more about it.

Update on Financial Matters – Board

Mrs Roebuck reported the last quarterly accounts to 31st December had been circulated and the ones for March will be issued end of April.
Mrs Roebuck informed the Board that one Board assessment remains outstanding. The Chairman is taking appropriate action to recover this debt.

Bailiff Cover Expansion

& Mr Miller explained that there has been an upturn in incidents during lockdown and suggested that the level of Bailiff cover is increased in a cost-effective way. A suggestion was made to find one or two local interested candidates that could complete the bailiff training exam to then assist on a voluntary level, provide paid holiday cover or cover over busy periods. Mr Miller expressed although we are not over run it is good to have a plan in place. Mr Miller requested for approval to obtain the additional cover. The cost of training is approx. £90pp but would need additional funds to cover the cost for their assistance and equipment.

Mr Marsden suggested that ghillies could be approached for this role. Mr Miller explained that he is aware there may be a couple of ghillies interested and agrees with Mr Marsden's suggestion. Mr Miller explained that having a trained fisheries bailiff would be more beneficial should a situation arise where a court proceeding is required. The Bailiff will not be seen as a member of the public but as a trained fisheries bailiff that has observed events.

Mr Cruickshank and Mr Allwood expressed they are in favour of progressing this. All members unanimously agreed.

The meeting then focused on Trust Business.

Update on Financial Matters – Trust

Mr Cruickshank congratulated the Trust team on their work. The Trust was anticipating a much larger financial loss but the various measures that the Trust put in place have lowered that deficit.

Mrs Roebuck reported that although accounts have not been finalised, she can see a smaller deficit than originally predicted albeit work was lost or reduced throughout the year.

The valuation of the Trust investment fund held by McInroy and Wood was at £141,107.

Mrs Roebuck informed all members that both Mr Miller and Mr Walters had been on flexible furlough since January but are now back to their original working hours as of the 15th March 2021.

Report by Mr Miller & Mr Walters on DBI Trust work

Mr Miller, Director of the Trust, and Mr Walters, River Operations Manager, have 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 – Interviews are being carried out for a seasonal officer for 4 months to assist Karen on the Deveron and on the Ythan and Ugie. This will be funded by SNH.

Crayfish Sighting and Investigation – A cray fish was potentially sighted by an angler. Mr Walters applied for the appropriate licensing to investigate further. The traps at Muiresk were monitored for a month however nothing was caught. The traps will be put in again as the water temperature increases to make sure nothing was missed.

Water Quality – There was two incidents of direct pollution. One was traced back to a diesel bowser and the farmer has since been given a warning. The other incident was found whilst conducting a survey by Trex Ecology who came across sewage fungus, which has also been traced back to the farm in question and they have put in remedial action until the sewage plant can be replaced.

The results from October are still not in as JHI are operating on reduced capacity. Once all the results are in Mr Walters is due to have a meeting with Dr Marc Stutter to discuss how to take this forward. Discussions will include whether the Trust have fulfilled their role in highlighting the pesticides or whether to continue. There is a cost involved in doing this work and the Trust have expanded the program throughout it so should the Trust continue the work another agreement of the cost from JHI will be obtained.

Invertebrate Survey - Mr Walters explained that Mr Craig Macadam who's a specialist in his area from the charity Buglife was due to do a survey but there were limitations due to lockdown. Mr Macadam recommended to look at 30 years of SEPA data in the Deveron. From this information trends can be seen such as rations and the changes in different families to tell whether there is a temperature problem, sediment problem or a pollution problem. This data can reveal a lot of information at an affordable cost. Mr Walters explained once the data from SEPA is received the Trust will get a report costing approximately £3,000 compared to the one-off survey that was approximately £8,500. Mr Walters suggested that the Trust do this analysis and then look at those results. Once that is complete an infield survey can be done at the back of it. An infield survey is just a one snapshot in time whereas this analysis shows long term trends and possibly highlight some areas where there are concerns. This can be followed up with a field sample in a more targeted approach. Mr Walters will be seeking for the board's approval for that change of approach.

Bird Count and Scaring – Monthly counts have been conducted and in addition Mr Walters has been speaking to keepers in the upper catchment. The Glenfiddich and Cabrach keepers are actively scaring and are sending Mr Walters a weekly report. This is an informal count and will not count to go into the Nature Scot license but can be included as evidence. The Edinglassie keeper will also be doing some scaring. Mr Shields suggested a map to report what is seen and where. It is informal and gives value when in negotiations with Nature Scotland.

Atlantic Salmon Trust Collaboration – Scat samples from various fish-eating birds were collected in the autumn as part of a trial that AST are doing, to see if they can use the environmental DNA to look at what those birds had been eating and identify what species the scat came from. They will also identify which species of fish the birds have been eating. A meeting has been arranged to get fresh results and see whether this trial has been constructive.

Kelt Carcass heads that have been washed up on the river banks have also been collected to analyse what the fish was eating, where they resided and if they were exposed to pollutants.

The AST are pushing ahead with an application with Marine Scotland Science for a joint counter and tracking project for the Deveron as a “indicator river”. The application is progressing and being submitted to government but there is no further progress to report as off yet.

The tagging of the Atlantic salmon smolts as part of the AST missing salmon project is ready to start as soon as there are some smolts. Mr Walters and Miss Muller have undertaken further training to do the tagging. A 100 smolts of a certain size will be tagged.

Electrofishing – Plans for the summer are underway but the question remains for whether the Scottish Government through the Marine Scotland science will be funding the National Electrofishing Project for Scotland which is a standardised methodology of electrofishing right across Scotland. This gives a comparison against not only the rest of Scotland but against this benchmark module they produced. Mr Walters expressed the importance of this in terms of the data it provides but it also funds the electrofishing.

Mr Allwood asked if it is possible to coordinate the electrofishing to work in with the results that Trex Ecology provide. Mr Walters agreed and suggested to increase the sites on the Kind Edward Burn on the back of the report provided by Trex Ecology and make the best value of it.

Health and Safety – All trust staff are being tested with lateral flow tests weekly especially if they plan to be in proximity. Mr Shields suggested the use of the polymerase chain reaction test if a staff member tests positive since the lateral flow tests throw out a lot of false positives. It was said by Mr Miller that these tests are being funded by the AST.

River Deveron Gin – The Trust is in contact with the distillery for producing more Gin and also looking at other aspects such as having a stronger addition made or with a limited-edition label.

Lower Tributaries project- The King Edward burn surveys have been completed and a report is being produced. Mr Miller reported that the gravel and spawning areas were very clean but felt this could be a result of the spate that occurred in the previous year and also the speed of the water coming down through the catchment. He feels it would benefit from more silt in some areas to slow the flow and to better the environment for the fish to be in. Mr Miller to follow up in the next board meeting.

Seal License – The United States will continue to buy farmed salmon only from areas that does not actively harm / shoot seals. The Scottish Government removed the right for salmon farms to shoot seals. Mr Miller reported that

through Scottish Government legislation to protect a decline in species from another species of interest, The Moray Firth seal license were able to again submit an application to remove seals.

Windfarms- There are 3 potential developments in a short area, so the Trust is keeping a close watch.

Mr Marsden enquired about the Board/Trust's standard position on windfarms and whether they are supportive or have a standard negative response to the legislation governance. Mr Miller responded by explaining that the Trust must be careful as it represents the boards interest. The board is there to protect the habitat and the fish. The Trust's first approach is to always conditionally object to a windfarm until they learn more about the plan and how it might or might not affect the fish or the habitat.

AOCB – Letter from Mr Morison Mr Morison has raised a point regarding the advertising and booking of fishing on the Deveron. Mr Morison asked about improving the ways of advertising to get more interest in bookings. Mr Allwood suggested facilitating in some way for people to be able to find where fishing is available on the river Deveron and to find what is available and when. Mr Allwood asked to discuss this further at the next board meeting.

AOCB – Forgue Burn pollution incident update Mr Miller explained that the site was revisited within a few weeks of the pollution source being stopped. The burn recovered very quickly, the sewage fungus receded, and the burn became clear again. Fish were lost but the burn is in much healthier state. The farm has also been visited by SEPA.

AOCB – Lack of Kelts Mr Breakell expressed that over the years he has observed the lack of kelts being caught and wondered if this was due to spawning earlier and recovering earlier or if more are dying. Mr Miller agreed the number of kelts had declined and explained there was a lot of fish died after spawning last year. Mr Miller was unsure of what the reason for the decline in numbers of kelts being caught was.

AOCB - FMS Mr Allwood explained Fisheries Management Scotland has urged members to write to the political representatives to encourage matters on the rivers. Mr Allwood felt the board should be writing a letter with the Board's approval. All members agreed that a letter should go to all political candidates.

AOCB – Fish Welfare Mr Marsden raised concern regarding photos posted on social media of fish laid on the grass next to the angler's rods and suggested to politely and sensitively educate anglers to keep fish in the water whilst they take their 'trophy shot'. Mr Miller explained that Miss Muller is very good and strict on that in terms of the Trust's own social media. The Trust did reissue the fish welfare guidance which can also be found on the website and on all social media platforms. A laminated copy was also sent to every beat.

AOCB-WhatsApp Group for Proprietors and Ghillies Mr Allwood expressed the need for the board to be more of a facilitator and joining up interested parties to see whether things can work more smoothly and help where it can. Mr Allwood suggested a WhatsApp good for riparian owners who need to know things or wish to receive publications from the board such as how the smolt run is going or news regarding invasive species. Mr Allwood suggested putting out a circular to various people and see whether they would like to be included on the WhatsApp group.

AOCB- Virtual Meetings Mr Shields suggested the continuation of Teams meeting access for those who are unable or do not want to attend when meeting in person is permitted. Mr Allwood agreed and suggested the Board have appropriate measures to set up and make this possible.

Meeting closed at 2.00pm Mr Allwood thanked everyone for attending.
 Next meeting – Thurs 8th July, 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>
Conduct review of water quality programme and find out costs to continue water quality testing if required.	MW			
Bailiff cover expansion.	RM			
Increase Electrofishing sites on the King Edward Burn and Crooksmill.	MW/RM			
King Edward Burn Survey – follow up.	RM			
Create WhatsApp group for Riparian Owners and Ghillies.	RM/SR			
Access to virtual Meetings when meeting in person is permitted.	SR/RM			