

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
held via Teleconference on Thursday 9th April 2020 at 1pm.
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:** Malcolm Hay (B & T), Jim Cruickshank (B & T), Matthew Marsden (B), Robert Shields (B & T), Rory Cooper (B & T), Frank Henderson (B & T) (Turrieff Angling Association & Turrieff Community), Andrew Allwood (B), Richie Miller (B and representative of DBI Trust)
In attendance- Mrs S Roebuck (Clerk to Board and Administrator of DBI Trust);
{ B = Board member; T = Trustee or representative}
- Chairman:** Malcolm Hay
- Apologies for Absence** Richard Marsden (B), Donald Galloway (B), Mrs J Player (B), A Gordon Morison (B), David Borthwick (B & T), Richard Breakell (B)
- Minutes of Meeting on 4th December 2019** 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.
- Mr Hay asked Mr Miller to send board members the final figure for the rod catch.
- Mr Hay wanted confirmation on whether a video had been posted on how to release fish with minimum damage. Mr Miller confirmed this has been done.
- Aquaculture and Fisheries (Scotland) Act 2013** Mr Hay reported that there were no changes noted to Board Members Financial Interests since 4th December 2019 as applicable to the Board. No complaints against the Board had been received by the Clerk since the last meeting.
- Mr Hay explained that owing to a windfarm proposal in the works at Edinglassie, he would have to step down as Chairman. As the Trust will be involved in writing a Fisheries Management Plan for mitigation of any construction works, there was a clear conflict of interest if he was to remain in an executive role with either the Board or Trust. Given the current difficulties, Mr Hay proposed that he would stay on as Chairman through to the July meeting when the assessments are set. This would give the Board ample time to agree on a successor whose appointment could then be ratified at the AGM in the autumn. This was agreed unanimously.
- Update on Financial Matters** The government announcement, just prior to the meeting, to cease all its electro fishing plans will have a serious impact on the Trust's budget for 2020. In addition, while the Trust had planned to continue with the smolt trapping and tracking programme as normal, the main partners on the project, the Spey Fishery Board, had decided to stop all operations. Having removed their traps and their staff offsite, the Trust had no option but to do the same.

The consequent loss of income to the Trust from the cancellation of these projects means that the Trust will have to adjust its operations to meet the new financial reality, and this would involve some dislocation for the staff. Mrs Roebuck (Clerk/Administrator) was already working from home and it was confirmed that Miss Muller's post remained fully funded by SNH.

With so many operations now abandoned, it was difficult to justify the retention of both Mr Miller and Mr Walters full time for what would be limited, essentially, to bailiff work. In order to reduce the Trust's ongoing operational costs, Mr Miller put forward a suggestion to take advantage of the government's furlough scheme to cover Mr Walters for the ensuing 3 weeks. 80% of Mr Walters' salary would be covered by the government and the remaining 20% would be paid by the Trust.

Mr Miller would then focus mainly on bailiff work, which was considered essential given the recent increase in incidents both on the Deveron and neighbouring rivers. He would also carry on with meeting the consultations and all the other work as best as he could until such time as Mr Walters could re-join the team.

Another option discussed was for the Trust to stop all operations completely and furlough Mr Miller as well, retaining only Mrs Roebuck and Miss Muller who would report directly to Mr Cruickshank.

The Board agreed unanimously to adopt the first option, namely to retain Mr Miller on Bailiff duties, Mrs Roebuck on Administration (working from home) and furlough Mr Walters. However, the situation would be kept under review and revised either at the July meeting or, if necessary, by an extraordinary meeting prior to that time.

Mr Shields suggested the Trust should look into what options it has for payment holidays from insurers, as well as options for the postponement of office rent while work and income is limited due to COVID-19.

There had been calls from some proprietors to agree a reduction in the 2020 assessment ahead of the July meeting. Mr Hay suggested that the discussions on the appropriate level for the 2020/2021 assessments would be better left until July, at which point the Board might have a better idea of what is happening with the current global pandemic, and a clearer picture of the likely impact on the Trust's finances going forward.

The valuation of the Trust investment held by McInroy and Wood was £122,064.60 as of 09/04/2020. Mr Hay asked whether to leave the funds as they are or take some money out as precaution since the valuation had dropped significantly since the last board meeting in December. Mr Cruickshank expressed the view that the funds were a long-term investment and recommended against disinvesting unless and until a precise cash need was identified. This was unanimously agreed.

**Report by Mr Miller &
Mr Walters on DBI
Trust work**

Mr Miller, Director and Senior Biologist 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 circulated (available on request from the Clerk). The salient points discussed were as follows:

Fish Counters: Mr Hay reported that the letter from Dr Colin Bull regarding working with the Atlantic Salmon Trust was a great opportunity and might be an ideal solution to the problems we had encountered in trying to source an effective fish counter. While discussions are at an early stage, Mr Miller confirmed that he would continue with the groundwork and identifying possible locations so we would be ready if the project was to proceed.

River Deveron Gin: Mr Miller explained that the license has been put on hold due to the COVID-19 restrictions. The current license does not allow the Trust to post the Gin but it may be an option to get the Gin back to the distiller who would be able to sell and post it on behalf of the Trust for a fee.

Mr Andrew Allwood enquired about labelling and putting a different label on each batch. Mr Miller explained that demand was such that there would likely be further batches, and any new labelling ideas would be welcomed. Mr Allwood added that the Gin could be marketed as a premium product with a local artist designing a label to give the Gin a unique look. The original work could then be auctioned off, possibly as a lot in any future dinner auction. Mr Shields agreed but suggested the existing Deveron Bogie and Isla Rivers logo be retained somewhere on the bottle.

Oil Spill – River Isla: Mr Miller reported that SEPA's resolution of the oil spill was voluntary enforcement. SEPA had required that, in lieu of a court action, Chivas put money into a restoration project in and around the area of the spill. The Trust had been paid a voluntary donation from Chivas of £10,000. £5,000 of this will be spent on the Crooksmill Burn Project. The Trust is still looking for further funds to complete this project.

Bird Licence: Mr Allwood suggested the Trust should begin logging counts of goosanders and cormorants when the numbers on the river are at their greatest, mainly in the months of November, December and January. These would be in addition to the spring counts accepted by SNH, but which often recorded lower numbers as the birds were more widely dispersed at that time. Mr Allwood felt that these birds are now bringing their breeding times forward as a result of climate change, and the official counts ordered by SNH are, therefore, misleading. Mr Miller agreed and explained the count is traditionally during the main part of the smolt running but SNH have said that they would accept additional count information. However, they would not start taking it into account until the end of the third year of the current licensing scheme, so as to achieve a time series of information under both scenarios. Mr Miller expressed that the sooner they started the better.

AST missing Salmon Project: Mr Miller explained that up until the lockdown announcement by the Prime Minister, the Trust was proceeding as normal with the smolt traps. Both Miss Muller and Mr Walters had been trained to undertake the necessary tagging, but following the lockdown, the Atlantic Salmon Trust had postponed the project to next year.

Ghillies Rep and Trust Membership Secretary: While no-one had yet been identified to replace Mr Neil Stephen, discussions would continue at the ghillies' meeting.

Trust work plan under current “lockdown” conditions

It was confirmed that all Trust employees were currently working from home. Mr Hay explained that no-one should and no-one could be asked to do anything that made them feel unsafe. Any employee worried by any of this should speak up.

The agreement by all to work from home should be recorded formally, as should all further meetings between Trust staff. The Trust needs to be clear about what procedures have been put in place to protect its staff.

Fishery Management Subscription

Mr Hay explained that Fisheries Management Scotland are allowing members to pay 80% of the subscription now and the remaining 20% in October. Mr Hay felt we should take advantage of the split payment. All members agreed.

AOCB

Mr Shields suggested if we were to do another teleconference Microsoft Team should be used. Mrs Roebuck agreed to investigate this.

Meeting closed at 2.30pm

Mr Hay thanked everyone for attending

Next meeting – Thurs 2 July, 12 noon, Castle Hotel.

Please note this may change if current COVID-19 restrictions are not lifted