

Argyll Fisheries Trust AGM Minutes
Microsoft Teams Meeting, 11.00am, Friday 6th November 2020

Attendees:

Andrew Barker (AFT Chairperson)-AB, Roger Brook (AFT Director/ADSFB Chairperson)- RB, Robert Younger (AFT Director/Clerk to the ADSFB) -RY, Alan Kettle White (AFT Senior Biologist)-AKW, David Stewart (AFT Director/Creran District rep), Alastair Reynolds (Co-opted Director)-AR, Tim King (Treasurer)-TK, Alyssa Stewart (Secretary)-AS, Jonathan Brown (AFT Director-Awe District Rep)- JB, Jane Wright [AFT Director]-JW, Marina Curran-Colthart (Biodiversity Officer)- MC, Ian Tegner – IT, Caroline Fleming- CF, Helen MacIntyre (HM), David Stewart – DS,

Apologies:

Hugh Nicol (AFT Director), Mark Smith (AFT Director), Sacha Klengel, Rebecca Smith (Forestry and Land Com), Tuggy Delap (AFT Director)

Introduction from the Chair

AB thanked everyone for coming.

There is a slight change to the meeting agenda, whereby Alan's Biologist's report will be presented after the AFT financial reports.

Apologies

As noted above.

Election & Re-election of Directors

AB asked for the following to be agreed.

Andrew Barker, Roger Brook, Jonathan Brown, and Tom Turnbull are due to retire by rotation and prepared to be re-elected. All were unanimously re-elected.

Hugh Whittle has decided to retire from the Trust Board as he is spending less time in Argyll. AB thanked him for his contribution as a Director.

Alasdair Reynolds was elected as a full Member of the Board after having been co-opted last year.

Hugh Whittle's resignation has left an opportunity for a director to be appointed. AB asked if anyone has suggestions for a new Director, especially someone from an area of expertise such as Forestry or Aquaculture [if not a conflict of interest] not currently widely represented on the Board.

Minutes of 2019 AGM

Jane Wright was in attendance but not recorded as being so.

The minutes were approved.

Matters Arising

SANDS

Ian Robinson had arranged last April a meeting with the Dunoon, Lochgilphead and Oban Angling Clubs which was cancelled due to lockdown and it would seem that the project as a whole has been put on hold due to COVID-19.

JB advised that there is very little further to report with the Dawnfresh escape. The decision has been made to stand back and see if penalties will be imposed in the future, but nothing is likely to happen with the Awe escape last year. BY stated that he has asked for Polly Burns to take up this case, BY commented that it is sad that Mr Salvesen appears to be 'hiding behind' Marine Scotland.

The Dawnfresh escape has incurred costs of £38-40k with the cost to the Board and Trust being for Alan's time. JW suggested that a detailed bill be submitted, JB reported that this has already been submitted to Mr Salvesen. BY agreed that it would be useful to have these figures for Marine Scotland, Ann Anderson at SSPO has conceded that there should be a statutory penalty for escapes. RB agreed that by providing monetary cost Marine Scotland may act in the future.

'Moving People, Making Waves'

There is no update, and it is believed that Nick Beavers (NB) has been unable to get financing for the project.

JW has offered to contact Nick Beavers for any news. Although AFT cannot support financially, they may be able to offer help in other ways. AKW spent a day with NB advising on the management of habitat on the Burn in Gairlochhead and proposed development.

Accounts from 2019/20

TK presented the accounts.

Overall, the accounts show a deficit of £5,034 compared to an originally budgeted deficit of £8,723. This compares to a surplus of £4,147 for 2018/19.

There was a shortfall on income of £9,102. Overheads were less than expected and contractor costs were £2.5k less than budgeted.

Income:

Our income of £84,554 is £8,985 short of budget (£93,539). TK commented that this was in fact, better than had been forecast at half-year and with a busy final quarter, the Trust finished 2019/20 in a reasonably strong financial position.

RB approved accounts, seconded by JB.

Forecast for 2020/21

The Statement of Financial Activities had been circulated and has outlined the budget for 2020/21.

AR had asked what the current bank balance is. TK advised that it is about £112,000. The free reserves are approximately £50,000.

Whilst there was a healthy bank balance, because of Covid restrictions meaning that field work could not be carried out for much of the early part of the year, AKW was furloughed from April until the beginning of July.

AS secured a Government small business grant of £10,000 in May as part compensation for loss of earnings. The Trust also received £12,000 in respect of the cancelled WCST project.

AS had circulated a chart showing income so far for 2020/21 of £38,000 and there is optimism for significant income for the final quarter of the year. This results in an overall forecast for the year of a deficit of about £4000. AB stated that considering there was no work completed in the lockdown period April through June, the Trust have done remarkably well.

DS questioned what the income would have been from the Atlantic Salmon Trust (AST) West Coast Salmon Tracking project had it gone ahead. RB explained that it is also a FMS project. The Etive and Awe are involved in tagging juveniles which is an invasive procedure for which AKW successfully completed a home office licence training. There is a virtual meeting later this month with a refresher training in January, and hopefully the project will be ready to go ahead in April 2021. MSS were going to be running the traps in the Orchy and AFT were running traps in the Etive, however MSS are withdrawing due to the Covid related risk to their staff, therefore the Trust plan to run a trap on the Orchy with the help of Ewan Mclellan and another trap on the Etive with the help of Mark Shone. AKW will try to get a more detailed estimate of what the income will be for the Trust at the planned meeting.

JW asked if the work can be balanced with the amount of time that can be claimed on furlough. There is no plan for AKW to be furloughed again, as he is the main source of income. TK stated that the challenge is that if AKW is behind in projects, getting additional groups of contractors/volunteers may pose an issue under Covid restrictions. There is habitat work to be completed on the Ruel which can be done within the regulations.

AKW summarised that the following contracts and projects to complete: FMS Carradale farm escapes genetics Project, the River Awe Project (redd count) and outstanding contracts at Kintarbet hydro before the end of 2020. There is also some work to identify obstacles to migration for the Argyll DSFB which will inform the MSS Salmon Conservation Limits in winter 2021 and maintenance of the Stream Temperature monitoring work (Awe catchment) and the River Ruel habitat improvement work which was cancelled due to the lockdown in spring 2020 and has already been paid for.

Expenditure:

Overall, our expenditure is in-line with budget.

Salaries and pensions:

Help from HMRC with Alan being on furlough.

Motor expenses:

Small error in travel costs should have been £2250, the SOFA will be reissued.

AB thanked AS and TK for the information which is very much clearer.

Staffing

AB congratulated AKW and AS for having kept the show on the road so efficiently over this trying time.

Early in 2020 an advertisement had been placed for a full-time biologist to help for AKW in the expected increase in fieldwork due to Aquaculture EMPs and other project development. However, with Covid restrictions, the marine work planned for the Sound of Shuna (SoS) EMP was cancelled due to lockdown. However potentially there is a need in the future for another biologist to be employed to help AKW (whom the Trust is over-reliant for income).

MM stated that the Argyll Coast Trust have employed people to work through the restrictions and guidelines safely, they have upped their staff 6 folds.

AKW explained that he is regularly using two local people to help with fieldwork. But by using two people on a casual basis, daily rates are expensive and also dependant on when they are available to work, so per day it is costing more than an employed member of staff, but balanced by the fewer number of days they are employed. It causes some problems in terms of flexibility. Covid guidelines and travel is also a consideration; face masks are worn in the car with a window open, AKW is doing his utmost to work within the regulations and minimise the number of face-to-face contacts which reduce the potential for transmission. If fieldwork for the SoS EMP's is re-started in spring 2021 then another person will be required urgently.

TK stated that the Trust also needs to increase its project capacity, so any new member of staff will need to be able to develop new projects and carry out fieldwork.

AKW will draft a revised job description and when the future is more stable with Covid issues, the Executive Committee will decide on the timing for another advertisement to be placed.

IT asked if there are other organisations competing for the work the Trust are doing. AKW explained that most projects tend to be generated by a source of funding on a national basis (such as MSS) by FMS and therefore priority is given to Fishery Trusts. There is competition for contract work but AFT are well placed to be competitive. Competition for contracts may come from other parties, especially with hydro contracts. But by being local, the AFT are usually in a good position in respect of Argyll contracts and are likely to be approached first as costs for travel and expenses should be competitive.

AB thanked AKW and AS again for all that they have done over the last 12 months.

Biologists Report

AKW presented the biologists report and took questions from the Directors.

Fisheries Projects

Carcass replacement / nutrient project

In addition to the report AKW added that this project was being expanded by FMS / MSS but has stalled due to reservations from SEPA and SNH. There was due to be another meeting, but this was cancelled due to covid-19 lockdown. AKW to update as and when more information becomes available.

Awe Catchment Studies (ADRIA) - Reporting completed for 2020

Loch Fyne Rivers Juvenile fish survey - Reporting completed for 2020

River Goil Habitat Improvement Works - AFT were able to help Lochgoilhead community Trust to complete the project in summer 2020 and TK reported that the project worked well and hopefully there is more to come in 2021.

River Ruel Habitat Improvement Works - AKW has spoken to Alastair Steven and they have budgeted for a contribution to the Ruel in 2021 in the region of £3500 which is the same as that provided in 2020. The 2020 delayed work to be completed this winter 2020/21.

Government Projects

AFT has collaborated on several projects developed and funded by Marine Scotland Science in collaboration with Fishery Management Scotland (FMS) but some had been cancelled due to the Covid-19 lockdown.

MSS National E-fish programme (NEPS) 2020 - This project was cancelled for 2020 due to COVID-19

MSS Sea trout sweep netting 2020 - This project was cancelled for 2020 due to COVID-19

AFT received compensation of £12,000 through FMS to help with lost income.

MSS Mapping Salmon Pressures 2019/20

AKW completed work for the project in January to March 2020. This report has not been published yet, but RB thinks that it is going to be used by the government and a Salmon Strategy group, RB has sighted a provisional map highlighting the pressures.

FMS Carradale Escapes Genetic Project 2020/21

CF asked AKW regarding the genetic sampling of the fish, that surely their genetics have been compromised due to previous escapes. AKW explained that the good thing about this project is that the introgression level between farmed and wild fish will be investigated and recorded and moving forward there will be a better idea if escapes have influenced wild populations.

CF asked if the government would recognise damage, AKW stated that it is the governments scientist that are involved, selecting testing areas so Scottish Government should be made aware of any findings. There is no guarantee of action being taken.

RB stated that there is a big difference between MOWI's attitude and their compensation of direct consequence losses to that of Dawnfresh and their response. MOWI have accepted their responsibility in respect of the Carradale escape of nearly 50,000 salmon. Although AFT will be paid for their work collecting samples, there is no statutory penalty or compensation for escapes.

AB thanked AKW for his very full Report.

Any Other Business

JB had previously raised the future format of Board meetings, and said that virtual meetings often have been successful, with a greater attendance. He proposed that at least some meetings continue virtually. RB suggested that we might hold a meeting at a hotel but also invite attendance through virtual means. AS will investigate this.

The next Board meeting will be in February and, depending on Covid restrictions, is likely to be held virtually.

JW stated that it is the Trusts 25th Anniversary next year, and this should be acknowledged along with all the hard work of AKW, achievements of the Trust, and the LAIA. Johnny Turnbull started it along with Philip Burns Smith.

AR suggested a refresh of the website. AB welcomed the suggestion however with the unknown financial future, it could not be prioritised. AKW added that more time is spent on the Facebook page and could be linked to the website. AS stated, that she had started working on the website using AR suggestions from earlier on this year, however more work is needed.

BY thanked AB for the Trust joining the 'Our Seas Coalition' and gave a brief background. 'Our Seas' has a petition for protecting the inshore seabed and is made up of 60-70 organisations who have an interest. There is a destruction of the inshore habitat through the mobile sector, trawling, and dredging. There is catastrophic loss of inshore biodiversity. If anybody is interested, please sign the petition on their website and is a useful way of pressuring MSS.

The AFT AGM merged with the Argyll District Salmon Fishery Board meeting.

Discussion and update on aquaculture

RB reported that FMS have hired Polly Burns as their Aquaculture Interactions Manager. Polly Burns will coordinate and ensure the Boards across Argyll and other areas are consistent with their responses to aquaculture which is key and very important. Polly's background is in Certificated Schemes for Approval Aquaculture such as the ASC standard and she has done a good job in co-ordinating the response to the MOWI escape at Carradale.

Although she is employed by FMS her job is funded by Marine Scotland and the Crowne Estate.

SIWG's report was released in May 2020 with 42 recommendations. There should be a much stronger regulatory body and there should be an appointed regulator, which was not named in the report but should be SEPA and it should be their job to protect wild fish. SEPA have always denied any responsibility of monitoring wild salmon, and sea lice but are concerned with the farmed salmon's welfare and sea lice on the farm. This would be a breakthrough. The regulator should give a licence based on their regulations with conditions attached and sanctions for escaped fish, this licence should take the place of EMP's.

AB was instrumental in getting a question raised in parliament, they stated that a reply would have been made to Donald Cameron's request in due course, 6 months have passed and there has not been a response.

There is an expected increase in funding for monitoring of wild fish if more EMP's are agreed however, not all companies are going to automatically give AFT the job for the monitoring.

The aquaculture industry was going to allocate money for helping wild fish, approximately £0.25million per year, but this does not seem likely now. SSPO proposed that they would nominate the chairman and the wild fish representatives on this committee, which was not acceptable to RB and AW. This initiative seems to have stalled again.

TK asked if the licences would have any implications for projects and the work that AKW would have to do. RB explained that the licence should include the need to protect wild fish and therefor the work should still be there.

Seal Licencing

America will not buy salmon for any country that shoot seals. FMS have found a loophole whereby if the wildlife is being protected, however, it is not acceptable to shoot seals to protect fish farms. The Board have not shot any seals in recent years.

CF asked if a letter was written objecting to the application for the new fish farm in North Arran. There is a huge objection locally. RY stated that the ADSFB are maintaining their objections.

DS asked if there in anything under the salmon form reform project initiative that RB approves of. RB does not have the details and cannot comment. DS and RB will discuss at a later date.

NEXT DIRECTORS MEETING:

TBC for February