

## **Minutes of the Argyll Fisheries Trust AGM**

**At 1pm on Wednesday 1<sup>st</sup> November 2017, The Inveraray Inn, Inveraray**

### **Attendees:**

Andrew Barker (AFT Chair)- AB  
Maja Pepper (AFT Manager) -MP  
Alan Kettle White (AFT Biologist)-AKW  
Alyssa Stewart (AFT/ADSFB Admin) -AS  
Roger Brook (AFT Director/ADSFB Chair) -RB  
Bob Younger (Clerk/AFT Director) -BY  
Jonathan Brown (AFT Director)-JB  
Jane Wright (AFT Director)-JW  
Hugh Whittle(AFT Director)- HW  
Keith Miller (AFT Director)-KM  
Bill Duff (salmon angling rep/DDAC)  
Jake Chambers ( President of DDAC)  
Penny Hawdon (SSC)-PH

### **Apologies:**

Tony Huntington  
Stephen Austin  
Jeremy Hall-Smith  
Patty Hall-Smith  
Marina Curan-Colthart  
Gordon Grey Stephens  
Richard McKenzie  
Hugh Nicol

### **1.Introduction from the Chair**

Andrew Barker thanked everyone for coming.

AB gave a brief breakdown of the AFT staffing situation which would also be discussed during MP's presentation of the accounts later in the meeting.

Craig MacIntyre, who was the office manager, has now left the trust to work for the Esk Fisheries and Rivers Trust due to uncertain funding in the future for the West Coast. AFT are in the position to employ two biologists, AKW and MP who has taken on the role of office manager and AS as a part-time administrator. During the summer there was a full-time assistant who helped with field work and data input, his contract has now ended.

AFT have suffered a predicted £30,000 loss over 2016/17 which was a result of the Wild Fisheries Review being abandoned by Scottish Government. Craig McIntyre gave a large amount of time and effort to the Wild Fisheries Review which resulted in him sacrificing other duties and fundraising,

which is also reflected in Andrew Thins letter to the Minister for Environment and Climate Change. The review and re-organisation of fisheries management in Scotland was 'kicked into touch' and it has been reported to have cost the wild fisheries sector approximately £2m with no outcome or tangible benefit to fisheries in Argyll.

KM asked who was responsible with disengaging the Wild Fisheries Review, RB explained this was Roseanna Cunningham, the Cabinet Secretary, and happened upon her appointment. The discontinuation of the Wild Fisheries Review was a political decision, probably related to cost and with the current government it is unlikely that the review shall return.

A discussion took place as to how the trusts could be represented, RB suggested this could be through Fisheries Management Scotland or independently depending on the nature of the issue.

## **2. Apologies**

As noted above.

## **3. Minutes from 2016 AGM**

The minutes were approved for the AGM of the 19<sup>th</sup> October 2016.

The AFT Directors minutes from the 4<sup>th</sup> July were also approved.

## **4. Matters Arising**

None.

## **5. Accounts from 2017/2018**

MP presented the accounts.

AFT income was £96,599, this was a deficit of £32,770 from the previous year. Contract income £44,385 and Charitable Income was £51,623. There have been savings made from fuel costs and CM salary (due to him leaving). The deficit should be offset the following year due to only being two members of full time staff, not three.

Not all projects could be completed in 2016/17 due to the wet weather and high river levels preventing practical work being carried out. MP was off on maternity leave for most of the year which has slowed progress on projects, therefore. MP explained that the aim will be to begin projects in Awe, Fyne, Aray, Ruel, Add, Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Project. MP is also keen to develop the LLTNP project with Heritage Lottery Funding.

The Atlantic Salmon Conservation Schools Network (ASCSN) want schools and High Schools to be involved in the conservation of salmon, this has potential to be a good income.

AKW spoke of Environmental Management Plans (EMP) for changes in fish farms consents. Argyll and Bute Council wish to be involved, monitoring the fish farms impact on local wild fish populations. PH explained that there will be requirement for more regulatory procedures for on-site

applications. AKW also stated that it is possible that Marine Harvest to be in breach of their planning consent at Carradale as no EMP had been agreed or enacted. AKW will action a complaint against MHS to try and secure some effective monitoring of wild fish in relation to the continued expansion of fish farming operations. Marine Scottish Science are also involved in establishing science supporting EMPs, but there are no clear outputs from them at this stage. IF AFT can secure the scientific work related to this process it would provide AFT with some income and produce data for management purposes.

AB stated that the cashflow is still positive and the forecast does show a small surplus on the current year. This will be updated on a regular basis, MP shall complete a forecast for 2017/18 detailing the total of incoming resources.

AB asked if the accounts could be approved. It was agreed that any feedback should be given within 10 days, after which AB shall sign off the accounts. All agreed.

Action: MP will send accounts via email.

JB asked how the trust prioritise what projects are carries out. AKW explained that wild fishery donations are restricted funding, the money being ring-fenced / spent in the areas where the funding comes from. Often the contractual work for developers has to be prioritised due to terms of the contract, which in wet years may lead to some wild fishery work not being completed. This work is then carried forward to the following year. For unrestricted funds (donations), surplus is often spent on habitat projects or an educational project.

## **6. Re-election of Directors**

Three directors are due to retire at this AGM, Roger Brook, Andrew Barker and Tom Turnbull. All are re-standing, JW proposed.

## **7. Any other business**

RB spoke of the Wild Fisheries Review and has concerns that Fisheries Management Scotland do not have much appetite for raising funds to the same extent as The Rivers and Fisheries Trusts of Scotland (RAFTS). RAFTS role was to raise funds for the nation or significant areas within Scotland, however the money has dried up. RAFTS used to apply for European funding which has seized due to Brexit. There is little enthusiasm from FMS for doing the same job.

BY proposed engaging an external fund seeker. KM questioned how the funding would be distributed within the trust or amongst other trusts. RB explained that RAFTS used to take 7% of and funding they raised. AB explained that it is important that there is enough work coming in to pay for projects, and that staff have time to develop other projects and fundraising.

JW commented that when the funding was available the AFT utilised the three biologists on site, completing necessary data gathering and projects. AKW added that the new focus is on conservation limits for fisheries. Electrofishing and other data is needed to inform this process, which means AFT investing time and resources to ensure data is entered onto the SFCC database where it can be viewed and utilised by government agencies. The Scottish National Heritage have

been supportive of collecting data where there are no fishery-based funding, but this funding may not be forthcoming in future which means that the survey data may not be kept up to date.

JB asked if there was anyone we could approach for funding who has previously been involved with the AFT. AKW will review this.

AB stated that the AFT had received a very generous donation from the Blackmount Trust. AB has written to ask if they would like to nominate a representative to be on the board. They have not responded yet. If anyone has any ideas please let the trust know.

## **8. Biologist Report**

AKW gave a presentation of the activities of the trust, which include: Awe barrage counter and fishery data showing a decrease in adult salmon abundance and changes in salmon stock composition. The electrofishing data show a response in decreasing juvenile populations. MSS smolt migration data and local marine pressures. Local funds may be used to improve habitat. A significant number of contracts have been undertaken but there has been little project funding to support outreach work with the exception of wind farm funds.

Data from River Fyne show that Sea Trout numbers have improved while grilse / salmon numbers are now very low after an improvement between 2007 and 2012 with a big decrease in 2016. It is similar for River Etive, there is a very low number of fish returning to these rivers, and AKW is not expecting to see anything different this / next year.

Escapee farmed fish numbers have been relatively low but AKW stressed the need for the fisherman's presence on the rivers to pick up any incidents. Recent escape on Mull has impacted the River Ba.

AKW reported that the small grilse that have been returning in recent years are likely to be ineffective breeders due to their size, which is likely to be a consequence of poor feeding conditions at sea and warmer water conditions. Multi Sea Winter Salmon numbers have also decreased in 2017 following a strong year class in 2016. This low abundance may possibly be due to a changeover point from dominance of one to multi sea-winter Salmon. AKW had some positive news from the National Oceanographic Centre, which suggest sea surface temperatures are moving into a cooler phase which may improve survival rates of smolts at sea.

Between 2000 and 3000 smolts were tagged with a passive integrated transponder (PIT) during the smolt runs of 2016 and 2017. Data has not been received yet partly due to a technical fault.

Larger smolts were also tagged with acoustic tags. The information received suggest that 80% of the salmon are migrating along the west side of Mull, the remaining proportion are migrating via the Sound of Mull. This is of concern as there will be increases in the tonnage of salmon farmed in the lower Firth of Lorne where most smolts migrate.

The AFT have carried out electrofishing surveys in the River Awe to estimate the number of juvenile salmon present, AKW reported that there has been a large drop in the number of spawning fish but fry production hasn't altered significantly. Similar surveys also carried out in the River Orchy suggest that fry numbers had decreased along with adult counts, although survey conditions have not been ideal this year.

The dam removal at Galla Brega Bum has increased the number of young trout in the stream.

AKW summarised the sea lice monitoring results which show that there is a relatively high burden of sea lice, particularly for Awe and Nell. The figures indicate a bad year for lice which may be related to the production cycle of local fish farms and could be an issue for smolt migration. The lice results were particularly high in Loch Fyne, PH did not want to comment as this has already been addressed in meetings that RB has attended.

The number of fish were low for sampling in Carradale, which is a Scottish Government funded project, the fish were just not there.

Other Juvenile Surveys have salmon fry numbers have dropped in many rivers. SEPA have also been surveying in the Argyll area and have their own data to assess which will be useful in the future.

AKW discussed the option of hatchery and stocking intervention. Although there has been a reduced number in smolts, juveniles and adult pawning adult AKW suggested that stocking is not necessarily the answer. There is concern that interference may produce unfit offspring and undermine natural selection to a degree. Another option would be to avoid handling and selection of brooding fish, allowing the natural selection to take place, thereafter electrofishing the emergent fry and redistributing them at lower density to minimise competition and increase overall survival to the parr stage. RB asked where this would be proposed to be carried out, AKW acknowledged that this is an area for future development which need to be undertaken in combination with redd counts.

The AFT has been encouraging landowners to take up replanting schemes however it is a conflict of interest for some landowners as it may not be a priority where deer stalking and other farming or other management options are favoured over tree planting.

AKW talked through contracts that have taken place: 2016 including 8 Hydro, 3 wind farm developments, 5 barriers assessments and in 2017 13 hydro developments, 1 wind farm development, 1 FWPM assessments. It is essential that AFT takes on commercial contract to keep afloat, however these had to be prioritised over other work as the weather has been bad over the last two summers, reducing the number of field-work days.

## **9. Discussion on Aquaculture**

RB reported that there had been two developments.

One is that Marine Harvest are working towards improving their work practice and standards to gain accreditation from the Aquaculture Stewardship Council. This would result in smolt farms being taken out of fresh water and the reduction of number of lice per fish. However, Marine Harvest are in discussion with the ASC and FMS to negotiate the standards.

A discussion took place as to whether SSC would also be interested in gaining accreditation from ASC, PH commented that Marine Harvest have more resources than SSC and presently it is not something that SSC are ready for. PH spoke of closed containment trials in Norway, there are teething problems and some systems work in Norway waters but not in Scotland.

The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, which is government run, have agreed to an enquiry into aquaculture challenges and are beginning to collect information.

Salmon and Trout Conservation UK have pressurised the government to release information on the farms that do not meet the minimum lice standards, which will be useful.

RB reported that the East Coast fish catches have increased and the West Coast have decreased, if the South West Highlands had kept pace with the East Coast, they would be catching 3 times the number of fish we catch today. Differences in west and east coast fish numbers may be related to west coast aquaculture development. There are 260 fish farms in the west coast, approximately 200 between the west and the north Atlantic, which migratory smolts must pass.

There had been an incident of escaped rainbow trout from Dawnfresh, it is still unknown how many trout escaped but over 200 were caught in the River Awe. Also, there is the possibility of escaped salmon in Mull from SSC.

There was an independent consenting review, as a result the government want to take consenting process from the planning authority to Marine Scotland. Their decisions may be political and concerns were made known as to Marine Scotland conflict of interest in the marine environment and politics.

A discussion was had regarding environmental management plans (EMP). There is an opportunity to develop a policy that is fit for purpose, with a rational fair process. BY, RB and PH discussed the need for a concrete and clear role for the boards and fish-farm consultations / planning consents.

BY spoke of the potential move of the responsibility of managing assets from the Crown Estate to the local authorities, would be positive if some of the funding could be invested in river development.

HW asked PH about the use of wrasse in cages at SSC and questioned whether they can escape and what happens to the wrasse eventually. PH explained that they cannot escape and that regrettably Marine Scotland want the wrasse culled at end of season however SSC would be happy to continue using wrasse. There is still a lot unknown about farmed wrasse and PM explained that using wrasse reduced the need to use chemicals for the treatment of lice.

JW asked what proportion of wild wrasse to farmed wrasse are used, PH stated that SSC use wild wrasse however she didn't know the percentage over the industry.

## **10. Wild Fisheries Reform**

- a) General Discussion**
- b) Argyll-Loch Lomond Discussion**
- c) ASFB/RAFTS FUTURE**

This has been discussed earlier on.

## **11. Date of next AGM**

Trust Board Meeting Wednesday 7<sup>th</sup> February