

Lochaber Fisheries Trust

Minutes of Director's meeting, Aonach Mhor, 30th November 2009

Present

Viv de Fresnes (VF) Chairman

Grace Henderson (GH) Vice-chairman

Sandy Grierson (SG) Treasurer

Roger Brook (RB) RAFTS Chairman

Andrew Wallace (AW) RAFTS Managing Director

Callum Sinclair (CS) RAFTS Director

Diane Baum (DB)

Lucy Smith (LS)

Apologies

Barbara Collins

Simon Boulton

Address from RAFTS

RB summarised the structure of RAFTS and its role. Fundraising is an important part of RAFTS' work. Core funding for Trusts has largely disappeared and project funding is now more common. Funders such as Scottish Government and SNH prefer to work through RAFTS rather than 24 individual Trusts. RAFTS also has a role in improving communication between Trusts and encouraging best practice. RAFTS represents Trusts in national meetings.

CS said that RAFTS had trouble bringing in core funding for Trusts, but tries to find funding for projects that Trusts want to do. CS described the Fisheries Management Plan process, FASMOP genetics project and Biosecurity Plan as examples of where RAFTS had matched funding to the work Trusts wanted to do. Future projects could include Scottish Government grant for project work and training, providing electrofishing data to SEPA and an eel survey for SNH.

RB said that Trusts could gain a reputation for being economic, reliable deliverers of projects, but they must deliver consistently.

AW said that the original reason for RAFTS attending the meeting was to explain the increase in RAFTS subscription fee and percentage taken from grants. AW had subsequently sent a letter a letter to SG explaining that the fees had increased mainly because a significant donation had ended and RAFTS was now VAT registered. All agreed that the increase was reasonable and had now been explained.

AW said that smaller Trusts may benefit from sharing administration. Other Trusts were considering this.

SG said that he did most of the LFT's administration at no cost to the Trust. At present there would be no cost saving from sharing administration.

AW asked about relations between the LFT and LDSFB.

VF said that the situation had improved in recent years and there was a good working relationship in some areas. DB said that the LDSFB was now less directly involved in river management and LFT was trying to build relationships and work with individual proprietors and Sub-boards.

DB asked whether RAFTS presented the Trust network to funders as capable of carrying out fisheries management. DB was concerned that they are asked to sign up to projects that require the co-operation of proprietors and managers to deliver.

CS said that the Fisheries Management Plans set out the actions that should be done, many of which would be delivered by organisations other than the Trusts. Trusts must decide what actions they can achieve. All of the Trusts' work should be centred on management. In other areas closer relationships between Boards and Trusts enabled official Board endorsement of the Management Plans and the actions they recommend.

AW suggested convening a meeting to discuss links between Boards and Trusts across Scotland.

Minutes of previous meeting

Minutes were accepted as an accurate account of the meeting

Matters arising

Slice treatment of Lochy smolts – Marine Harvest have appealed to Scottish Ministers for permission to use Slice in freshwater. Decision is still pending.

Update on RDO and TWG issues

SG said the truck and lease had now passed to Skye. DB confirmed that West Sutherland FT would be taking the screw trap on 6th December.

DB said that she had tried to get the agreement of the Lochaber RSG about projects proposals for TWG funding, but had received no response from John Rea or Ben Hadfield. Gideon Pringle and Jon Gibb had expressed interest in reviewing project ideas.

AW said that TWG was held up by Scottish Government as a model system for farm and wild fish interaction at international meetings. Wild fish interests needed to ensure that this impression did not go unchallenged. At recent meetings RAFTS had demanded changes to the TWG and relocation of a small number of sites was now being talked about seriously.

RB suggested that if there was no progress on improving the TWG, then wild fish interests should be prepared to withdraw from the process. CS said that any withdrawal should be planned and timed for maximum impact. All agreed.

Biologist's report

See attached.

RB said that experimental Slice treatment of smolts could provide important information of lice-induced mortality and return rates of stocked smolts.

AW offered to provide contact details of Nora Hanson at St Andrews who are using stable isotope analysis on adult salmon caught at Strathy.

LS to provide AW with contact details for Sgt Major Credland.

Treasurer's report

SG said that Trust expenditure was slightly below predictions and income was coming in as expected. SG was concerned that such a high proportion of Trust income came from Scottish Government.

AW said that as government expenditure was squeezed in future years, Trusts may actually benefit as they can deliver government commitments at lower cost.

Trust Van

SG explained that the lease for the Trust van ended in February 2010. Extending the lease would not be sensible. A decision on its replacement would need to be made soon. SG described some of the van leases he had found at similar cost to the current van.

AW offered to send SG details of a vehicle dealer used by other Trusts.

Date of next meeting

Next Director's meeting will be on Friday 19th March at 11 am.

Biologists Report

- **Electrofishing surveys**

Extensive electrofishing surveys carried out on the Ailort, Aline, Inverie, Lochy, Morar and Shiel catchments. Information on juvenile salmonid numbers also collected at five sites on the Cona & Scaddle, Leven, Moidart, Nevis and Strontian catchments as part of the eels survey. Data analysis and report preparation is ongoing. Overall densities appear higher than in the limited surveys carried out in 2008, but are generally poor to fair in a national context.

- **Eel survey**

Second year of eel survey completed. Eel distribution appears to be highly variable between years. The size of eels caught shows a range of age classes are present in the region and the small eels caught (in large numbers on the River Shiel) demonstrate recent recruitment has occurred. Interim report has been submitted to SNH and grant payment received.

- **Genetic sampling**

Results of genetic samples taken from Strontian, Shiel and Lochy catchments expected in spring 2010. Not clear if genetic markers used will be capable of identifying farm fish introgression. Samples collected from Aline and Morar in 2009 for analysis next year.

- **Salmon in the classroom**

8 schools recruited so far for next year's project. First visit to schools will take place in December/January. RLA and Loch Shiel Estates have kindly offered eggs for the project.

- **Biosecurity Plan**

First draft of the plan nearly finished. RAFTS are preparing a bid to the SEPA Restoration Fund for coordinated programme of non-native plant control.

- **Trout isotope project**

Results of the isotope analysis are now available. There seems to be a difference in the isotope signatures of trout close to the farm cages and those from the control site. Differences were also seen in growth rates and age structure. In discussion with University of Glasgow and University of Bangor to expand this into a PhD that could identify how far the effect of the farm extends into the loch.

- **TWG**

Seine netting at Camas na Gaul and Kinlocheil is ongoing. Lice levels on sea trout post smolts continue to be low. Report of netting results from April-July 2009 submitted to TWG and Linnhe/Lorn AMG. Plankton trawls at Camas na Gaul and Kinlocheil also ongoing.

- **Hydro work**

Electrofishing, habitat and freshwater pearl mussel surveys carried out to inform development of hydros on Corrou Estate, Slatach and Dubh Lighe. Total value - £11 000. All reports submitted.

Future Work

- **Lochy smolt return study**

PIT tag decoder is being fitted to the Mucomir fish pass this winter. Returning grilse from the 3 000 fish tagged in 2009 would be expected from August 2010. A further 3 000 smolts will be tagged in April 2010.

- **Smolt tracking study**

Marine Scotland Science are hoping to use hydrophones to track salmon and sea trout smolts in upper Loch Linnhe.

- **Experimental Slice treatment**

SEPA decision on the use of Slice in freshwater is still pending. Logistics of experimentally treating smolts if permission is not granted could make it unfeasible. MSS and Marine Harvest currently looking at options for how it could be done.

- **Coe Boulder**

The TA will be removing the boulder and trees from the waterfall on the River Coe in May 2010.

- **Lundy Barriers**

Funding bid submitted to SEPA for a scoping study to look at options for removing or modifying old hydro barriers.

- **Glensanda electrofishing**

Electrofishing survey to look at the effect of watercourse improvements at Glensanda quarry.