



RIVER DOON DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD

Clerk to the Board: Iain K Clark, LLB (Hons), Dip LP, NP
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MINUTES

of

Meeting of River Doon District Salmon Fishery Board

Thursday 17 February 2022 at 4pm,

Western House Hotel, 66 Craigie Road, AYR KA8 0HA

1. Present

Name:

Organisation (Position):

Alan Macdonald (AM)

Doonside Estate (Chairman)

Iain K Clark (IKC)

Clerk to the Board

Stuart Brabbs (SB)

Ayrshire Rivers Trust

Mark Colman (Mandatory) (MC)

Smithston Fishings Club

David Cosh (DC)

Doonfoot Fishings

Lawrence Dalglish (LD)

Blackhill, Rozelle

Martin Donachy (MD)

Woodlands

Carlos Van Heddegem (CVD)

Holms Fishing

Peter Kennerley (PK)

Auchendrane House

2. Apologies

None

3. Declaration of Members' Interests

The Clerk explained the procedure required under the new Good Governance Procedures (see below) and each of the Board Members present completed and signed Declarations of Relevant Interests, which will be retained by the Clerk to the Board.

4. Approval of Minutes of the Last Meeting - Doc 1

Approval of the Minutes of the last meeting on 24 March 2021 was proposed by DC and seconded by MD; and with no revisions or opposing motion, the Minutes were approved.

5. Matters Arising from Previous Meeting

- (a) *Revised Code of Practice approved 3 December 2021* - was issued to Riparian Owners and Angling Clubs on 10 December 2021, with emphasis again being placed on the Board's Policy that it **strongly urges** Anglers to adopt a 100% catch and release culture throughout the season, with the key aim being to conserve our wild salmon fish stocks for now and the future.

- (b) *Website* – Access was made available by SB to the Clerk; and it has been updated, including publishing prior Approved Minutes, Revised Code of Practice, and updated Board Member and Contact Details.

The Board had a discussion regarding the news content on the Board's website and the newsfeed from ART Website. The consensus of the meeting was that the Board wanted to continue to include the news feed from the ART website, which includes news on other rivers and the work of other DSFBs in Ayrshire.

The Clerk will continue to upload information and documents from the Board to the Board's website, which will also be used to communicate to its stakeholders, including the general public regarding its ongoing work.

- (c) *Annual Bird Count / Cull* – This took place on 31 January 2022, with Riparian Owners being notified by email, by letter and also notified on the website. The full extent of the licence granted was not utilised. A further date was agreed for 27 March 2022. The Clerk will notify Riparian Owners and on the Board's website.

6. Good Governance re District Salmon Fisheries Boards

The Clerk introduced and explained the purposes of each of the new Good Governance documents, which had been drafted with input and assistance from PK and MD. Each of the documents were approved by the Board, as noted below:

- (a) Complaints Procedure
- (b) Meetings Protocol
- (c) Policy on Members' Interests
- (d) Declarations of Members' Interests

The Board authorised the Clerk to publish the documents on the Board's website and to send them to the Scottish Ministers and Fisheries Management Scotland ("FMS").

7. Report from Ayrshire Rivers Trust ("ART")

SB presented the Report from ART (attached).

The Board discussed and agreed, bearing in mind the Good Governance procedures adopted by the Board, it was appropriate to formulate a plan for projects which could be progressed. The Board requested ART prepare to present relevant options from the Fisheries Management Plan. SB agreed to come forward with suggestions. Examples to be considered were habitat improvements e.g. to the Purclewan and Chapelton Burn.

The Board also discussed possible funding options. There was a discussion about whether the Board were prepared to accept funds deriving from aquaculture. The Board agreed in principle it would accept such funding, if it contributes to the conservation measures for the river e.g. to habitat improvements to benefit fish stocks. ART is currently applying for funds of £300k for fencing across Ayrshire on that basis. If successful, this could contribute to projects on a number of rivers, including the River Doon. It was also noted that there may be some funding available which requires matched funding (ART is aware of some projects where e.g. the applicants require to match funding up to 10%). The Board was willing to consider all options for the benefit of the river, subject to their being sufficient funding to carry out such work.

There was a query regarding the reference in ART's Report that "...*Since the 1960's smolt survival across Scotland has declined from an estimated 30%, to just 2 – 3%*" and whether this was based on data collected by ART for the Board. The explanation given by SB was that this is generally accepted to be the position around Scotland, but that it is difficult to get objective data, which is why such projects as the Wild Salmon Tracking Project announced on 28 December 2021 as continuing in 2022, as well as the Missing Salmon Alliance, are so important. The Board noted we don't know objectively what happens to smolts from the River Doon when they go to sea; and this is something we want to find out more about.

There was a general discussion regarding information on annual catch returns for the other Ayrshire rivers. Details were unknown as yet. There was some suggestion that the River Ayr had only 71 salmon caught in 2021. The information from the River Girvan and River Stinchar was presently unknown, but the suggestion was that the numbers have been particularly low for 2021, due to the drought conditions. It was noted (as below) the annual catch returns for 2021 on the River Doon were 498 salmon – the best they have been for several years, despite the summer drought, which success is likely at least to have been associated with the compensation flow from Loch Doon Dam.

There was also a discussion about the extent of rod effort in 2021. The perception from Board Members was that rod effort in 2021 was no more than in other recent years, although there was some discussion that there appeared to be other anglers who had been members of angling clubs on other Ayrshire rivers coming to the River Doon to fish because of its Scottish Government Grade 2 status, compared e.g. to the Grade 3 status applied to other Ayrshire rivers, such as the River Ayr and River Irvine.

The Board wished to note once again that, despite the River Doon's classification once again as Grade 2, it remains the Board's Policy that it **strongly urges** Anglers to adopt a 100% catch and release culture throughout the season, with the key aim being to conserve our wild salmon fish stocks for now and the future.

8. Report from Clerk to the Board

The Clerk presented a detailed Report, noting the following in particular:

(a) Correspondence/Actions Since Previous Meeting

- (1) Correspondence with Board Members and Meeting of Sub-Committee of the Board re Bailiffs and Enforcement 13 December 2021
- (2) 10 December 2021 – 56 x Letters to Riparian Owners and Tenants enclosing Fishery Assessment Notices 2021/2022, Updated Code of Practice and Update from the Board (44 of those letters enclosed the Annual Fishery Assessment Notices for 2021/2022. 19 letters were sent with Reminders for Fishery Assessment Arrears. The balance were sent to those where no Assessment Notice, or copies to Proprietors with Tenants *in situ*).
- (3) 10 December 2021 - Correspondence with Azets regarding Draft Accounts to 31 December 2020, Corporation Tax Return and Draft Accounts to 31 December 2021
- (4) 10 December 2021 – Update to Board Members of Actions following Board Meeting

- (5) 11 December 2021 – Correspondence with Smithston Fishings regarding Rebate and Assessments for Smithston 2017 to 2022
- (6) 23 December 2021 – further correspondence with Azets regarding Draft Accounts to 31 December 2020, Corporation Tax Return and Draft Accounts to 31 December 2021
- (7) 3 January 2022 – correspondence with Alan Shannon and then with Board Members re request to renew Water Bailiff Warrant (due to expire on 28 February 2022)
- (8) 4 January 2022 – preparing detailed notes from Meeting of Sub-Committee of the Board re Bailiffs and Enforcement 13 December 2021 and circulating to Sub-Committee
- (9) 7 January 2022 – detailed update email to Chairman re various (and subsequent meeting to discuss on 13 January 2022)
- (10) 13 January 2022 – 13 X Fishery Assessment First Reminder Letters and 6 X Fishery Assessment Second Reminder Letters sent to Riparian Owners and Tenants by email and by post
- (11) 14 January 2022 – Detailed Update to Board Members of Actions taken and required re Annual Report + providing advance sight of various documents for next Board Meeting
- (12) 15 January 2022 – email exchanges with Stuart Brabbs, Ayrshire Rivers Trust re website access; and then making changes on Website (www.doonfishing.co.uk)
- (13) 17 January 2022 – Calling Notices for Board Meeting 17 February 2022 issued to Board and published on Board's Website and sent to ART for publication on their website
- (14) 17 January 2022 - Drafting various Good Governance Documents: Draft Policy on Members' Interests, Draft Meetings Protocol and Draft Complaints Procedure and circulating by email to Peter Kennerley and Martin Donachy for review/comment
- (15) 18 January 2022 – Drafting Outline Annual Report and email to Board Members for input
- (16) 18 January 2022 - Calling Notice for Board Meeting 17 February 2022 issued to Fisheries Management Scotland for publication on their website
- (17) 18 January 2022 – email exchanges with David Cosh and SB of ART re Annual Catch Returns
- (18) 26 January 2022 – email to Board Members re SEPA Consultation Meetings on Sea Lice Interactions - 4 February 2022 and 8 February 2022
- (19) 28 January 2022 – email exchanges with Peter Kennerley re Good Governance Documents and further revising Drafts

- (20) 4 February 2022 – Attending SEPA & Fisheries Management Scotland - Consultation Engagement Session and taking notes thereon
- (21) 8 February 2022 – call and email with SB at ART re SEPA & Fisheries Management Scotland - Consultation Engagement Session
- (22) 10 February 2022 – further reminders sent re Arrears of Fisheries Assessments
- (23) 10 February 2022 – telephone meeting and detailed correspondence with the Partner at Azets who is responsible for preparing the Accounts and Corporation Tax Return for the Board (and instructing re preparation of Annual Accounts to 31 December 2021)
- (24) 15 February 2022 – calls and emails with National Trust for Scotland re Arrears of Fisheries Assessments
- (25) Correspondence and call with FMS re Draft Response to SEPA Sea Lice Consultation
- (26) Various calls and correspondence with the Secretary to the former Clerk regarding missing information and documentation (particularly the Certificate of Interest re National Savings and Investment Account to cover the period to 31 December 2021 and them accounting for various payments received by them post handover)
- (27) Extensive correspondence with various Owners, former Owners and New Owners, the Secretary to the Clerk to the Board regarding outstanding Fishery Assessments
- (28) Correspondence with DC and various Owners, former Owners and new Owners regarding outstanding Catch Returns; and updating the Catch Return Spreadsheet, as Catch Returns are received (including saving PDF copies for the Board's Records)
- (29) Updating Fishery Assessment Spreadsheet (on an almost daily basis), as payments are made, queries made and answered; and to establish remaining Arrears of Fishery Assessments.
- (30) Preparation of Report for Board re Proposed Fishery Assessments Rate for 2022/2023
- (31) Review of financial position and Preparation of Finance Update for Board Meeting
- (32) Collating documents from various sources for Draft Annual Report to be circulated to Board Members
- (33) Collating documents from various sources and preparing Board Pack for Board Meeting 17 February 2022

(b) Financial

i. Summary of Financial Position of the Board at 17 February 2022

The Clerk presented a Summary of the financial position of the Board as at 17 February 2022, as follows:

Funds Transferred from Frazer Coogans Solicitors on 03/09/21	£12,911.51
<u>PLUS</u> Income from Fishery Assessments (Arrears and 2021/2022) +	<u>£20,209.80</u>
Total Income to 17 February 2022	£33,121.31

LESS Expenditure on behalf of the Board:

Information Commissioner's Office – Annual Registration Fee	- £ 40.00
Ayrshire Rivers Trust - Annual Affiliation Fee 2021	- £ 6,218.36
Fisheries Management Scotland – Annual Membership 2021-2022	- £ 654.00
Gilson Gray LLP – Interim Fee for Clerk to the Board to 31/10/22	- £ 2,376.00
Gilson Gray LLP – Balance of Fee for Clerk to the Board to 31/12/22-	<u>£ 594.00</u>
Total Expenditure to 17 February 2022	- £ 9,882.36

Current Balance of Funds held at 17 February 2022 **£23,238.95**

LESS Estimated Regular Expenditure to 30 June 2022:

Azets – Accountancy Charges for year ended 31 December 2020	- £ 480.00
CE Project Management – Web Hosting/Domain Renewal 2022	- £ 59.00
Additional Fee to Gilson Gray LLP – Clerk to the Board (see below)	- £ 1,200.00
Information Commissioner's Office – Annual Registration Fee	- £ 40.00
Ayrshire Rivers Trust – Est Annual Affiliation Fee 22/23	- £ 6,450.00
Fisheries Management Scotland – Est Annual Membership 22/23	- £ 654.00
HMRC – Corporation Tax (Estimate)	- £ 30.00
Azets – Accountancy Charges for year ended 31 December 2021	- £ 480.00
Gilson Gray LLP – Interim Fee for Clerk to the Board to 30/06/22	- <u>£ 2,400.00</u>
Total Estimated Regular Expenditure to 30 June 2022	- <u>£11,793.00</u>

Estimated Remaining Credit Balance to 30 June 2022 **£11,445.95**

PLUS Estimated Income from Fishery Assessments 2022/2023 + **£17,000.00**

Estimated Remaining Credit Balance to 30 June 2022 **c. £28,500.00**

9. Update re Outstanding Fishery Assessments

The Clerk presented an Update regarding the Outstanding Fishery Assessments as at 17 February 2022, summarised as follows:

SUMMARY POSITION AT 17 FEBRUARY 2022			
RECOVERED BY GGLLP	% RECOVERED	TOTAL OUTSTANDING	BREAKDOWN
£3,974.30	82%	£870.00	Arrears
<u>£16,236.00</u>	93%	<u>£1,438.50</u>	2021/2022
£20,210.30	90%	£2,308.50	TOTAL
		£43.20	Write Off
		£517.50	Disputed
		£1,400.00	On Hold
			Included in Total Outstanding
			Excluded from Total Outstanding

The Clerk made certain recommendations, all of which were unanimously approved by the Board, as follows:

Monitor (for payment): £	808.50	Payments promised within 7 days
On hold:	£1,400.00	Re Beat 0270 (pending confirmation from Senior Valuer)
Debt Recovery Steps: £	369.00	Formal 7 day letters, followed, if necessary by Debt Recovery proceedings by Gilson Gray LLP (which would be separately chargeable work at Debt Recovery Rates)
Disputed:	£ 517.60	Re 0440 Arrears – The Board discussed and agreed to instruct Gilson Gray LLP to provide legal advice on the approach to be taken based on a limited fee of £150 + VAT, because of the principle involved.
Write Off:	£ 43.20	The Board agreed to write off the aged Arrears (dating back to 2018/2019) in relation to Beat 0130, due to the amount involved and the fact the costs of tracing the former owner would be more than the amount outstanding.

10. Proposed Fishery Assessment Rates for 2022/2023

The Clerk presented a detailed Report to the Board with analysis of previous Rates of Fishery Assessments from 2010 to 2021 and noted his Recommendation to fix an Annual Rate of 30p per £ for the Season 2022/2023 (i.e. to cover the period from 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023).

The Board discussed that, based on all the circumstances, particularly acknowledging the difficult two years preceding (i.e. 2020 and 2021), but the desire to provide for monies to help fund projects on the river, and to provide for some degree of contingency, the rate would be fixed again at 30p per £. The Clerk will issue the Assessment Notices in May 2022, once the updated Valuation Roll has been provided by Ayrshire Valuation Joint Board.

11. Draft Annual Accounts and Corporation Tax Return

(a) Annual Financial Statements to 31 December 2019

The Annual Financial Statements to 31 December 2019 prepared by Azets Chartered Accountants were presented to the Board. They had not previously been formally approved by the Board, as the Annual Meeting due to have taken place in April 2020 was postponed due to COVID-19 constraints, in accordance with Scottish Government Guidelines and following the advice issued by FMS to DSFBs.

The Board approved the Accounts and the Chairman was authorised to sign them on behalf of the Board.

The Clerk was authorised to publish the Accounts on the Board's Website, to send them to FMS and the Scottish Ministers and to arrange to include them in the Annual Report for approval by the Annual Meeting of Qualified Proprietors on 31 March 2022 and presented at the Annual Public Meeting on 28 April 2022.

(b) Annual Financial Statements to 31 December 2020

The Draft Annual Financial Statements to 31 December 2020 prepared by Azets, Chartered Accountants, previously instructed by the previous Clerk to the Board, were presented to the Board. The Clerk informed the Board that Azets could not finalise the Accounts until they had the Interest Certificate to show the interest on the National Savings Account. The Clerk had requested that the Secretary to the former Clerk obtain this from National Savings and several reminders had been sent, but this had still not been received by the date of the Meeting.

As requested by the Board at the last Board meeting, the Clerk instructed Azets to prepare the Draft Financial Statements without the interest figure, on the basis that the Accounts can be adjusted when the Certificate is received from National Savings. Those Draft Financial Statements had now been received. These had not been approved by the Board previously, as the Annual Meetings due to have taken place in April 2021 was postponed, due to COVID-19 constraints, in accordance with Scottish Government Guidelines and following the advice issued by FMS to DSFBs.

The Board approved the Accounts and the Chairman was authorised to sign them on behalf of the Board. The Board approved payment of Azet's fee in this regards.

The Clerk was authorised to publish the Accounts on the Board's Website, to send them to FMS and the Scottish Ministers and to include them in the Annual Report for approval by the Annual Meeting of Qualified Proprietors on 31 March 2022 and presented at the Annual Public Meeting on 28 April 2022.

(c) Corporation Tax Return

Azets recommended (on 23 December 2021) that standing the Annual Financial Accounts to 31 December 2020 were yet to be finalised, (due to the missing Interest Certificate from National Savings), they should submit the Corporation Tax Return at Nil and, when the Interest amount is clarified, they will send an Amended Return and pay any Corporation Tax thereon. That was to avoid a penalty charge from HMRC for late Return. On behalf of the Board, the Clerk accepted their recommendation and instructed them to proceed accordingly.

Regrettably, despite a clear instruction to Azets by the Clerk, due to a miscommunication in the offices of Azets, they did not submit the Corporation Tax Return (with associated Appeal) until 1 February 2022. As a consequence a Notice of a proposed £100 penalty had been received. Azets have confirmed in writing they believe the Appeal will be granted, but if it is rejected, they will cover any costs for late filing due to their error.

(d) Annual Financial Statements to 31 December 2021

The Clerk advised that Azets Chartered Accountants had been instructed to prepare the Annual Financial Statements to 31 December 2021 and they had been provided with all of the relevant information and documentation that is understood will be required by them to prepare the Draft. The Draft is expected to be received in approximately two weeks. When received, the Clerk will circulate to the Board Members as soon as they are available; and in advance of them being made available for approval for inclusion within the Draft Annual Report to be presented to the Annual Meeting of Qualified Proprietors on 31 March 2022.

(e) Correspondence from Robert Brown of Dalrymple Angling Club

The Clerk had received correspondence from Robert Brown of Dalrymple Angling Club requesting copies of the Accounts for the previous three years. The Board noted (as above), that, due to the disruption caused by COVID-19, the usual arrangements for preparation, approval and publication of the Annual Financial Statements for 2019 and 2020 had required to be postponed.

The Board agreed that all three sets of Annual Statements (2019, 2020 and 2021) would be included within the Annual Report to be approved by the Annual Meeting of Qualified Proprietors on 31 March 2022; and then presented to the Annual Public Meeting on 28 April 2022.

The Clerk was instructed to send the Approved Financial Statements for 2019 and 2020 to Mr Brown and to explain that the Financial Statement for 2021, when received, would be approved by the Annual Meeting of Qualified Proprietors and then be presented, as part of the Annual Report and Annual Financial Statements at the Annual Public Meeting on 28 April 2022.

12. Proposal Re Fees from Gilson Gray LLP re Clerk to the Board Services

The Clerk presented a proposal regarding Fees from his Firm, Gilson Gray LLP, regarding the Clerk to the Board Services provided. Standing the obvious potential conflict of interest in this respect, the Clerk thereafter absented himself from the Board Meeting to allow the Board to discuss the proposal, consistent with the Board's new Good Governance Procedures.

After a short discussion, the Board called the Clerk back into the meeting and informed him that they unanimously agreed as follows:

- (1) On the basis of the extensive additional work undertaken and successful recovery of £20,210.30 of Income from Fishery Assessments and Arrears by Gilson Gray LLP and, including the introduction of the new Good Governance Procedures and associated documentation and processes, the Board agreed to pay a 'one off' Additional Fee Note of £1,000 + VAT, as a notional recognition of the additional work undertaken. The Board noted that the bill would have been much higher, if commercial rates had been applied based on the actual time expended.

- (2) Moving forwards, the standard Annual Fee payable to Gilson Gray LLP for the Clerk to the Board Services will be increased to a Fixed Fee of £4,000 + VAT, which will be billed in two instalments each of £2,000 + VAT (one at 30 June and one at 31 December each year). That is a moderate increase of only £700 per annum, bearing in mind the rate has been fixed for several years previously at £3,300 + VAT. The Board noted this still reflects considerable value for money, compared to the actual time spent.
- (3) Any additional work instructed from Gilson Gray LLP will be agreed by the Chairman on behalf of the Board on an *ad hoc* basis e.g. advice regarding the Dispute re ownership of fishings or Debt Recovery Work.

13. Annual Catch Returns

Letters were issued to the various Riparian Owners and Tenants in November 2021, requesting completion of a simplified form of Annual Catch Return on behalf of the River Doon DSFB. This was in addition to the statutory requirement upon all Riparian Owners to submit the full Rod and Catch Return Form to Marine Scotland.

Annual Catch Returns were received and collated by DC, Recorder to the Board, and by the Clerk to the Board, analysed and then input to a spreadsheet. The vast majority have been received (some after multiple reminders). The Board noted its appreciation of cooperation from all Riparian Owners, Tenants, Syndicates and Clubs in this important task of engathering relevant data.

The Clerk to the Board then prepared charts to help in the analysis of the Catch Returns from 2010 to 2021 inclusive.

DC reported to the Board that, although Ayrshire had drought conditions, the 2021 season was the best on the River Doon since the crash in 2015, where the catches dropped by 50% to 300 fish per season. This year the recorded catch for salmon and grilse was 498, a reasonable increase, unlike other local rivers, perhaps because of the compensation flow from Loch Doon. It is the first year since 2015 that fish have held up in the lower beats, most of which had a much better season because of that. A slightly higher ratio of salmon to grilse than usual, but still no Autumn run, which historically was the best time on the Doon, although a few salmon were seen going over the Mount Charles Weir in December.

DC noted that the sea trout were virtually missing again and reported a much improved uptake of the Board's policy of strongly urging 100% catch and release throughout the season, with 95% of fish caught being released this year.

The Board agreed this Report and supporting Charts and Spreadsheet (duly restricted to show summary details, rather than specific data, beat by beat) should be included in the Annual Report to be approved at the Annual Meeting of Qualified Proprietors on 31 March 2022 and presented at the Annual Public Meeting on 28 April 2022.

The Board also discussed arrangements for the 2022 fishing season. It was agreed that DC will continue to engather the Annual Catch Returns and pass them and collate the data to the Clerk, who will retain same in terms of the Data protection requirements and as permitted under the Registration with the Information Commissioner's Office.

The Board discussed the form upon which the Annual Catch Returns are requested. It was acknowledged that, with the simpler Annual Catch Form used by the Board for

season 2021, there was a more comprehensive response (in terms of the number of beats who cooperated – although there were still a number of beats who required to be sent reminders, some on a couple of occasions). However, it was also discussed and acknowledged that information regarding the rod effort and the months in which fish are caught (neither of which had been included on last year's form) as well as the numbers of salmon and sea trout caught and released, are all relevant data. It was also discussed that the Rod Effort and Catch Return Form issued by Marine Scotland (and which it is a statutory requirement to return every year), is confusing and complicated for many beats to complete and submit.

The Board agreed that the Clerk should design a Form which gathers the additional data required, but which is easier for Owners, Tenants, Syndicates and Angling Clubs and Associations to complete. This should include recording days of fishing (including 'blank' days) and catches per month. The Clerk is also to consider whether there is any way for there to be some means of completing electronically or online (liaising with SB and DC, as appropriate); and to issue to Riparian Owners, Tenants, Syndicates and Angling Clubs and Associations, as well as specifically raising the importance of providing accurate records at the Annual Public Meeting on 28 April 2022.

14. Draft Annual Report

The Clerk presented an updated Draft of the Annual Report, which had been prepared with input from a number of members of the Board. Further input required was discussed e.g. photographs to be provided of various beats on the river; and illustrating the work done by ART on behalf of the Board.

The Board discussed the Board's priorities over the coming year.

SB of ART will provide proposals for habitat improvements to be made on behalf of the Board. One possibility was work perhaps being undertaken late in the season, before spawning, where we might try an experiment to clear a stretch of the river (e.g. Holms) prone to heavy weed build up through the season, to improve redds for spawning.

The Board anticipates requiring to respond, as it has done previously, to a number of Consultations from SEPA and Scottish Government, as well as to applications for new fish farms, wind farms and land developments in the catchment area of the Board. The Clerk asked for volunteers to support this work, which had mainly been undertaken with technical/scientific input from SB of ART and the Clerk and some others. PK and MC agreed to be part of a group who will deal with such Consultations.

It is also anticipated SEPA will be reviewing all watercourses throughout Scotland over the next few years, with the publication of the 3rd River Basin Management Plan (to which Consultation, the Board responded) being published in December 2021 and covering the next 6 years. So it is expected that the Board will have a significant role to play in that process.

The Board also agreed to hold the following Meetings over this year:

Annual Meeting of Qualified Proprietors: Thursday, 31 March 2022 at 7:30pm
Annual Public Meeting: Thursday, 28 April 2022 at 7:30pm
Board Meeting: Wednesday, 15 June 2022 at 4pm
Board Meeting: Tuesday, 6 December 2022 at 4pm

The Clerk will issue Calling Notices in accordance with the Board's Meetings Protocol.

15. Water Bailiffing

(a) Report on Water Bailiffing

MD presented a detailed Report, prepared following discussions at a Sub-Committee of the Board to discuss Water Bailiffing and Enforcement and further extensive research, including attempts to have discussions with Police Scotland.

The Board discussed matters arising from the Report and noted a number of apparent concerns regarding aspects of the Water Bailiffing regime which is proposed by Scottish Government should be put in place by DSFBs. The Board noted that it does not have sufficient funds to employ full-time (or even part-time) Water Bailiffs, nor would it want to do so because of the legal responsibility the Board would require to take for such employees, never mind the additional expense of insurance etc.

The Board also reached a consensus that they were not satisfied with the proposed regime of utilising volunteer Water Bailiffs with them being required to sign Disclaimers of Liability. With all due respect to the advice which was procured from FishLegal, by FMS on behalf of the Forth District Salmon Fishery Board, the Board questioned whether such a Disclaimer would be enforceable in Scotland; and, in any event did not consider that it was appropriate to invite volunteers to carry out voluntary work on behalf of the Board and to sign such Disclaimers.

Indeed, the Board was concerned to note that it could be held liable for any actions taken on its behalf, never mind the difficulties in insuring volunteer water bailiffs. The analogy which resonated with a number of the Board Members was that one would not expect Special Constables, who are also volunteers, not to be covered appropriately for duties similar to the duties and powers of water bailiffs.

In all the circumstances, the consensus was that the concerns identified were not possible of being addressed under the current regime. The Board considers the way forwards is as follows:

1. The Board does not feel that it is appropriate to fund and go through a process of training people to obtain Warrants as Water Bailiffs to cover the River Doon catchment area under the current regime, which it considers is unworkable and not fit for purpose. That could cost the Board as much as £1,000, which the Board considers would be wasted investment under the current regime.
2. However, the Board, as part of its fishery management responsibilities, takes the matter of enforcement seriously. Therefore, the Board will endeavour to encourage any volunteers who want to assist in enforcement actions to take on the role of 'River Watchers', who will be asked to be 'the eyes and ears of the river'.
3. We will particularly seek to encourage riparian owners, anglers, members of fishing syndicates, angling clubs and associations, as well as members of the general public to take on this role for the benefit of their community within the River Doon catchment area.
4. In terms of practicalities, if any suspicious or illicit behaviour is noted by such River Watchers, they will be encouraged to report, with appropriate details,

to Police Scotland (hopefully to dedicated Officers, coordinated through the Area Wildlife Crime Officer), to allow enforcement action to be taken.

5. MD will engage with Police Scotland, particularly to identify and engage with the Area Wildlife Crime Officer and local Officers who patrol the catchment area. In particular, it was agreed that the Clerk to the Board would invite them to attend both the Annual Public Meeting of the Board (when this issue would be raised for comment and discussion with those in attendance), and the subsequent Board Meeting on 15 June 2022, to discuss proactive cooperation, in advance of the key spawning period at the end of the season.
 6. Once the Board has put appropriate provisions in place, we will publicise those on the Board's website, so that those who are concerned to report any suspicious or illicit activity know exactly how and to whom such reports should be made.
 7. It was agreed that MD will re-craft his Report for consideration by the Board for submission to Scottish Government and FMS regarding the issues we have identified and with a view to the Guidance being updated and exploring alternatives. MD will also prepare a 1 page summary for inclusion in the Annual Report.
 8. The Board discussed the issue of poaching within the catchment and it was apparent that there were different views about the extent of any poaching on the river. This demonstrated the need to secure accurate information, which is why the proposed scheme of River Watchers would hopefully provide objective information, which would inform future enforcement actions by the Board in conjunction with Police Scotland.
- (b) The Clerk had been passed correspondence from Alan Shannon regarding renewal of his Water Bailiff Warrant (due to expire on 28 February 2022). Based on the foregoing discussion and decision of the Board, it was agreed that we would inform Mr Shannon that the Board would not be renewing Mr Shannon's Water Bailiff Warrant at this time. However, he would be encouraged to take an active role in the proposed scheme of River Watchers. There was also discussion regarding a known person who was a retired policeman, who might be approached to consider becoming Head River Watcher and work with others (including Mr Shannon, if he is interested) to promote the scheme.
- (c) The Clerk had been informed of a poaching incident (in late December) near the bridge going out of Dalrymple by Michael McCroskie, Ayr Angling Club. This was initially reported to DC and then reported to the Clerk in passing (when communicating on other matters) on 12 January 2022. The witness was apparently a retired Lieutenant Colonel. They had not challenged the individual, but they were apparently seen with a hen fish on the bank. No further specific details were forthcoming about the precise date or time or description or identify of the individual involved, so the Clerk was unable to progress any further action.

Again, the lack of accurate information illustrated the potential benefit of having a River Watcher scheme, with such volunteers being provided with relevant information about how to gather intelligence and report on any suspicious or illicit conduct on the river to Police Scotland; and thereby allow the Board to progress Enforcement action, as appropriate, through the police and Procurator Fiscal.

16. Updates / Consultations:

- (a) Environmental Standards Scotland Information Session 21 January 2022

The Clerk noted that no-one from the Board had been available to attend the Information Session previously circulated amongst Board Members.

- (b) Scottish Government Consultation - Guiding principles on the environment: draft statutory guidance **(closed 8 February 2022) – Doc 13**

The Clerk advised that he considered there was no need to respond to this specific Consultation, but he had circulated the Document for consideration by the Board, particularly due to its relevance to the SEPA Sea Lice Consultation response (below).

- (c) SEPA Consultation - Proposals for a risk-based framework for managing interaction between sea lice from marine finfish farm developments and wild Atlantic salmon in Scotland **(closes 15 March 2022)**

The Board noted the following draft Responses already prepared:

- i. Draft Response prepared by Salmon and Trout Conservation Scotland
- ii. Draft Response prepared by Fisheries Management Scotland

The Clerk and SB had each attended Consultation meetings on 4 and 8 February 2022, organised by FMS for members of DSFBs to discuss matters informally with SEPA. The Clerk and SB had also each spoken separately with Charlotte Middleton, Aquaculture Interactions Manager at FMS, to provide individual feedback on the SEPA proposals and the meetings with SEPA. They both gave verbal reports to the Board of common themes identified from the meetings, which were reflected in the draft Response prepared by FMS.

The Board noted that SB will be drafting a Response on behalf of ART. The Board discussed the approach to be taken and agreed that the Clerk and SB would liaise to draft and consolidate a Draft Response on behalf of the Board, based on the best of all three of these drafts; and will then circulate amongst the Board Members for review/comment (particularly by PK/MD), before submission on behalf of the Board.

- (d) Email from Professor Dr Martin Jaffa of Callander McDowell, 4 January 2022 - "Salmon Farming Exonerated"

The Clerk had previously circulated these documents to the Board, because he had received the email and their possible relevance to the SEPA Sea Lice Consultation. The Board considered the documents, but dismissed them as being of assistance, due to the flawed reasoning and data behind the documents.

- (e) Wild Salmon Tracking Project – 28 December 2021

The Clerk pointed out the announcement from Scottish Government on the continuation of the Wild Salmon Tracking Project in 2022, considered to be an important piece of work to assist in understanding better what happens to smolts after they have left our river.

- (f) Scottish Government: Scottish Wild Salmon Strategy - 14 January 2022

The Clerk had previously circulated the Strategy, now published on 14 January 2022, and the Board noted it would be particularly relevant to the SEPA Consultation on Sea Lice and future Planning and CAR Licence Applications.

- (g) Forestry and Land Scotland Consultation – Patna Land Management Plan, Submission 2022 (**closes 24 February 2022**)

The Clerk had been contacted by Forestry and Land Scotland on 8 February 2022 to comment or respond to their Consultation regarding their Draft Patna Land Management Plan. The Clerk had circulated the Comments made by ART. The Board agreed the Clerk is to submit a response in line with that prepared by ART.

17. Dates of Next Meetings

The Board agreed the dates and times for the following meetings:

Annual Meeting of Qualified Proprietors: Thursday, 31 March 2022 at 7:30pm
Annual Public Meeting: Thursday, 28 April 2022 at 7:30pm
Board Meeting: Wednesday, 15 June 2022 at 4pm
Board Meeting: Tuesday, 6 December 2022 at 4pm

The Clerk will issue Calling Notices in accordance with the Board's Meetings Protocol.

18. Any Other Business

- (a) *Noise & Nuisance update* – DC informed the Board that he understood South Ayrshire Council had put in place a system of monitoring such issues on the lower river on Fridays and Saturdays in April/May 2022. The Board commented that the monitoring required to extend in to June, once the examinations were concluded.
- (b) *Greenan Laundry Dam* – as a consequence of the spate on the river, the Greenan Laundry Dam had disintegrated and it was noted that seals were now getting in to the river. The Board noted that it was important that anyone who is aware of incidents of seals in the river should record these and report them to the Board, as this will help gather evidence for consideration by Scottish Government, as we are not permitted to do anything regarding seals at present.
- (c) *New Hydro scheme in Nether Mills, River Ayr* – SB informed the Board that ART were involved in the installation of a fish counter, which cost £110,000. It is a camera counter, which will help Scottish Government to model data for the Ayrshire rivers, and this will be of benefit to the River Doon, as there are currently no other nearby fish counters of that nature.
- (d) *Maintenance work on Loch Doon Dam* – The Clerk received a telephone call, then email, from Drax Galloway Hydros on 8 February 2022 regarding planned maintenance work to be carried out on Loch Doon Dam on 9 February 2022, with the compensation flow being scheduled to be cut off for one hour to facilitate the work.

With such short notice, all the Clerk could do was to enquire whether ART had been informed and forward the correspondence to them. ART was aware that

such maintenance was planned. They had been contacted in November 2021 and requested the work was postponed until after the main spawning on the river had taken place, to which Drax Galloway Hydros had agreed. But the new date had not been informed to ART until the same time as the Board.

The Board agreed this was too short notice to allow the Board to liaise with ART to make provision, should it be necessary, to carry out any fish rescue as a consequence of such maintenance being carried out. The Board decided that the Clerk should write to Drax Galloway Hydros to request that, if future planned maintenance work was to be undertaken, the Board requested at least one week's notice be given, so that necessary arrangements could be put in place with ART.

- (e) *Offshore salmon farms* - MC informed the Board that he had noted an article on salmon farms on the BBC (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-scotland-business-60344326>), where the suggestion was that, in order to address concerns regarding sea lice and pollution etc from salmon farms near wild salmon stocks, there was a suggestion of utilising larger fish farms which could be positioned further offshore, away from key migration routes for wild Atlantic salmon.

The Chairman thanked those in attendance and the meeting concluded at 17:40

BOARD PACK FOR MEETING

Agenda for Board Meeting 17 February 2022

- (1) Draft Minutes of Board Meeting of 3 December 2021
- (2) Revised Code of Practice at 3 December 2021
- (3) Good Governance Documents for Approval:
 - (a) Draft Complaints Procedure
 - (b) Draft Meetings Protocol
 - (c) Draft Policy on Members' Interests
 - (d) Draft Declarations of Members' Interests
- (4) Ayrshire Rivers Trust - Biologists Report for River Doon – 10 February 2022
- (5) Report from Clerk to the Board – 16 February 2022
- (6) Summary Update re Assessments – 16 February 2022
- (7) Detailed Spreadsheet re Outstanding Assessments – 16 February 2022
- (8) Report re Proposed Assessment Rates for 2022/2023
- (9) Draft Annual Accounts & Corporation Tax Return
 - (a) Cover letter (RIVED01) from Azets 23.12.21
 - (b) Draft Annual Accounts to 31 December 2019
 - (c) Draft Annual Accounts to 31 December 2020
 - (d) Corporation Tax Return to 31 December 2020
 - (e) Correspondence from Robert Brown of Dalrymple Angling Club re Copy Annual Accounts

- (10) Annual Catch Returns for River Doon
 - (a) River Doon Catch Returns 2010 to 2021 at 07.02.22
 - (b) Previous Catch Return Form for River Doon DSFB
 - (c) River Doon Annual Catch Return Form 19.11.21
 - (d) Marine Scotland - reporting-rod-fishing-effort
 - (e) Marine Scotland - rod+catch+form+2021
- (11) Draft Annual Report
- (12) Report on Water Bailiffing
 - (a) Minutes of River Doon DSFB - Bailiffing Sub-Committee Meeting 13.12.21
 - (b) Bailiff Report Final Draft by Martin Donachy 04.02.22
- (13) Scottish Government Consultation - Guiding principles on the environment: draft statutory guidance
- (14) SEPA Sea Lice Consultation:
 - (a) SEPA Consultation Document
 - (b) Draft Response prepared by Salmon and Trout Conservation Scotland
 - (c) Draft Response prepared by Fisheries Management Scotland 16.02.22
- (15) Email from Professor Dr Martin Jaffa of Callander McDowell, 4 January 2022 - "Salmon Farming Exonerated"
- (16) Merged Data Hides Differences in the Catch Trends of Scottish Salmon by Professor Dr Martin Jaffa of Callander McDowell 05.09.21
- (17) Scottish Government: Scottish Wild Salmon Strategy - 14 January 2022
- (18) NASCO Guidelines for the Management of Salmon Fisheries 2009
- (19) Report-Salmon-Interactions-Working-Group (SIWG) - April 2020
- (20) Forestry and Land Scotland Consultation – South Region, Patna Land Management Plan, Submission 2022 (closes 24 February 2022)
 - (a) Email from Forestry and Land Scotland 07.02.22
 - (b) Initial scoping invitation to stakeholders - Forestry and Land Scotland 14.01.22
 - (c) ART Comments on Patna Land Management Plan Consultation 07.02.22



Ayrshire Rivers Trust

working to improve Ayrshire's rivers and lochs

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17th February 2021 - Biologists report for the River Doon Proprietors and DSFB

To support the Doon DSFB, Ayrshire Rivers Trust (ART) biologists undertake comprehensive annual monitoring of the Doon's fish stocks each year to inform management approaches and to understand issues arising. We also monitor developments that have the potential to impact freshwater production and water quality (wind farms, pylon routes, hydro schemes etc.). With ART's involvement, the Board are kept informed of problems arising, failures or incidents affecting salmonid stocks through the results of the monitoring. Pressures that are identified and recommended mitigation measures are detailed within a fishery management plan that the Board use to guide their management approach. This allows problems to be prioritised and addressed.

Since the 1960's smolt survival across Scotland has declined from an estimated 30%, to just 2 – 3%. It is therefore little wonder that returning adult numbers have plummeted. These losses occur largely during the marine phase of the lifecycle and are therefore mostly beyond the control of river managers. Understanding where and why these losses occur is essential but not easily qualified or quantified and often disputed. Climate change, altered food resources and feeding grounds, aquaculture and by-catch to commercial fishing boats, have all been implicated to some extent. Addressing these declines relies on international agreements and approaches to be effective. This takes time and time is not on our side.

Much focus has been placed on conservation measures and angling as a means to prevent further declines. While anglers are not responsible for the huge declines we experience, they can play an important part in conserving the remaining salmon population. We are concerned that any easing of government conservation restrictions (e.g. a return to category 1 and permissible harvesting of salmon) would be detrimental and reduce spawning numbers. We believe Category 2 is currently an accurate assessment of the situation but suggest it is a somewhat pointless grading as it leaves opportunities for those less sensitive to stock fluctuations, to exploit stocks to the detriment of the overall salmon population. Therefore, we would support an immediate move to Category 3 and mandatory catch and release as a conservation measure for the sole purpose of protecting stocks and increasing spawning numbers. An automatic move to category 3 may be inevitable should recruitment decline beyond government thresholds over a 5-year average although currently it appears stable. Similarly, improvement may result in an increased grading to category 1. We think this unlikely in the foreseeable future.

Further reduction in marine survival may affect particular cohorts of the stock and could easily cause a collapse in natural production within the overall stocks. Thus, each unique stock component such as spring or autumn run salmon are valuable, vulnerable and their loss may be irreplaceable and catastrophic.

While the overall assessment of current salmon stocks may appear gloomy, it is not all bad and there are reasons to be encouraged.

The current status of salmon stocks within the catchment

Encouragingly, 2021 produced the best reported rod catch for some years (since 2015) with 498 salmon recorded. It is possible that increased rod effort due to the drought experienced on other Ayrshire rivers accounts for greater catches this season but similarly it may as easily be as a result of improved marine survival and increased numbers of adult salmon returning to spawn. It may also be linked to good smolt escapement from the catchment in previous years.

Across Scotland, angling participation is in decline so it isn't unreasonable to conclude that the number of fish captured is proportional to angling pressure. Several once productive beats on the Doon are no longer fished and clubs report declining memberships. This reduction in rod effort inevitably impacts on total river catches. Recording rod effort (hours/days spent fishing) and catches should be a simple but effective means to better assess adult salmon returning to the river.

The vast majority of salmon caught in 2021 were released unharmed and will hopefully have survived to spawn and complete their lifecycle. Theoretically, with increased adults returning to the river, juvenile production should be improved in 2022 but this doesn't always follow and we won't know until assessment of the 2022 electrofishing survey results later this year.

Between years, natural fluctuations in salmon numbers must be expected and are not easily explained. The greater the variation, the more likely this is as a result of significant changes in number of spawning salmon or the average size of salmon returning (the number of eggs deposited is proportional to size).

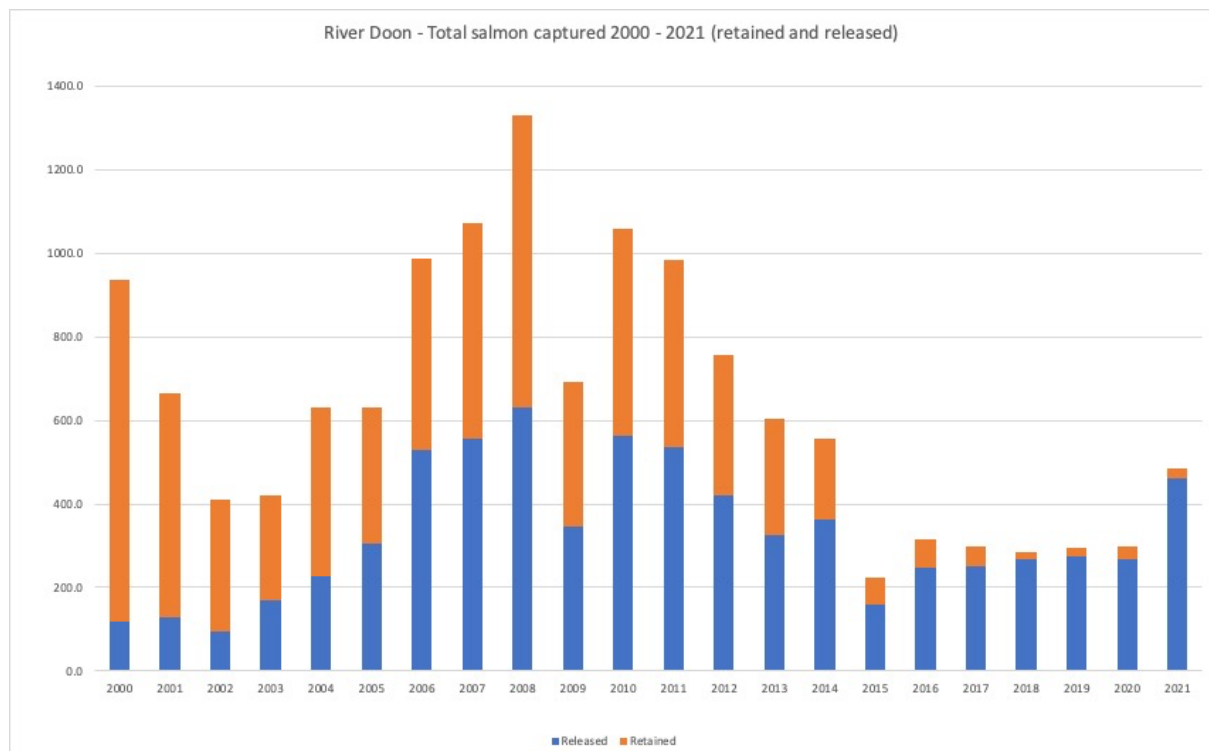


Figure 1: Reported rod caught salmon on the River Doon 2000 – 2021 (retained and released)

The DSFB continues to recommend that all salmon are released in order to protect the stocks and maximise spawning potential. While this is largely observed by most anglers, there is still room for improvement. ART whole heartedly supports DSFB calls for 100% catch and release in the current

climate. Anglers can make a positive contribution when numbers are low by returning all fish to help the species survive and stocks increase. Catch and release has risen from around 50% to over 95% in the last 10 years and this is encouraging.

ART's 2021 electrofishing report for the DSFB reveals juvenile salmon numbers improved compared to recent years and was the second best on record since 2003. Despite the rod catch for 2020 season being rather poor (276) and broadly consistent with the previous 5 years (average 279), juvenile salmon produced in winter 2020/21 and surviving to summer 2021 were recorded as above the 10-year average. This, despite a very long, wet and cold winter that is often assumed to reduce survival. Therefore, we consider egg to fry survival to have been good. Therefore, rod catch on its own cannot be regarded as an indication of the juvenile stock. There are many factors affecting rod catch and juvenile recruitment that extend beyond the obvious comparisons.

From a scientific perspective, freshwater productivity appears to remain adequate to repopulate the River Doon with salmon each season. Natural population fluctuations are to be expected in any system between years and are not always easily explained.

Juvenile timed electrofishing results indicate that productivity in the upper river is reasonably consistent and the lower to mid river sites have improved slightly.

SITE	LOCATION	SALMON/ MIN	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
TDM9	Top of Swallow Braes	FRY	16.8	23.6	11.2	1.4	3	4	7.4	3	3	6.2
TDM4	Doonholm, d/s Garden Pool	FRY	5	31	7.6	2.4	0	19.2	9.6	7.6	15.8	19.6
TDM25	Auchendrane Weir, side chann	FRY		20.4	11.2		0.8	4	7.3	2.6	7.6	10.2
TDM23	Monkwood, u/s Lemon Pots	FRY	4	45.2	10.4	5.8	2		9.2	20.2	16.2	19.6
TDM8	Holms, wide weedy riffle	FRY	7.4	20.4	9.6	13.2	4.6	17.4	19.8	20	8	19.2
TDM13	u/s Dalrymple	FRY	9.8	27.8	8	16.4	7.6	10.2	13.6	14.2	12.2	12
TDM15	Torr Bridge Skeldon	FRY	7.8	9.2	4	1.4	1.4	5.8	13.8	5.6	7.6	4
TDM20	Smithston, u/s Rabbie's Pool	FRY	12.6	14.6	12.2	13	0.8	8.8	8	9.8	5.6	5.2
TDM27	Craigengillan, d/s of stone brid	FRY					38.4	53.3	23.4	20		39
TDM24	Craigengillan	FRY	28.2	11.2	19.2	46.6	28.8	23.2	20.8	18.6		44.4
MEAN		FRY	9.9	22.6	10.4	12.5	8.7	16.2	13.3	12.2	9.5	17.9

Figure 2: 10 years of timed survey protocol results

Quantitative assessments of the tributary sites around Dalmellington and in the upper river appear to indicate productivity is good to excellent in these areas (where the can access) for both salmon and trout.

Site Code	Location	Grid Ref		Minimum estimates per 100m ²			
		Eastin g	Northing	Salmon fry	Salmon parr	Trout fry	Trou t parr
DCU3	Culroy Burn, at Minishant weir	232050	614300	0	19.4	174.8	12.3
DCU2	Culroy Burn d/s Minishant roadbridge	233200	614400	0	3.8	130.2	3.8
Ayrshire_0205	Purclewan Burn	235283	614387	0	0	0	5.1
Ayrshire_0193	Chapleton Burn	232711	61440	0	0	1	0
Ayrshire_0189	River Doon at Dalrymple	234666	614209	25.7	9	6.2	0.6
DRE6	Red Burn	245117	606552				

DKB1	Keirs Burn	243696	608618	0	0	0	0
DME3	Meikleholm Burn	242298	609409	2.1	0	23.6	4.2
DDRUM1	Drumgrange Burn	242627	609466	1	0	16	1
DPO2	Polnessan Burn	241737	611658	0	1.6	59.7	4.7
D60	River Doon	241112	612619	24.1	9.9	2.2	4.4
DDU1	Dunaskin Burn	244500	608200	55.7	15	22.8	6.7
DDU3	Dunaskin Burn u/s pipe culvert	244546	608260	56.9	8.5	12.1	0
DCB10	Cummock Burn near SWS compound	251145	607460	0	0	11.1	9.9
DCB9	Cummock Water d/s White Burn confluence	249922	606756	0	0	4.7	7
DCB6	Cummock Water at Chestnut tree	248225	606421	62	6	59	10
DCB7	Cummock Water Sillyhole Bridge	247566	606424	29.2	7.3	20.1	3.6
DCLN1	Linn Water d/s culvert	252174	607837	0	0	40.0	9.4
DCLN2	Linn Water	252854	607068	0	0	0	0
DMD1	Mossdale Burn at Mossdale Farm	249500	604300	17	1.1	10	0
DTR1	Trough Burn u/s confluence with Mossdale DS bridge	249751	604183	6.3	9.4	72	9.4
DMD4	Mossdale Burn u/s Trough Burn confluence	249648	604229	18.1	2.4	8.4	0
DMD3	Mossdale Burn d/s Benbrack Burn confluence	250981	605587	0	0	17.4	11.8
DMW3	Muck Water at Lay-by	249870	603229	8.2	8.2	60.8	10.5
DMW5	Muck Water u/s Culvert	234666	614209	0	0	7.6	5.5
DMW8	Muck Water Armco barrier d/s culvert	251013	602152	81.5	3.2	20.9	12.3
DMW9	Muck Water	246216	606227	16.9	0	34.5	8.5
DMW7	Muck Water at Dalmellington d/s Footbridge	248140	605866	17.3	21.6	11.9	2.2
Ayrshire_0198	Muck Water d/s Dalmellington Craignegillan roadbridge	247407	605927	201	9.3	0	0
Ayrshire_0182	River Doon at Craigengillan	247886	603527	64	7.7	0	0
DPN1	Polnaskie Burn	251757	600573	0	0	21	7.8
DPN2	Polnaskie Burn	251604	600648	0	0	8.4	0

Figure 3: Quantitative electrofishing results from 2021

Inconsistent or less productive areas exist where extensive alterations have been made to habitat or the impact of agriculture is more noticeable. Historic engineering to improve angling is responsible for reduced spawning habitat in some reaches and this may take decades to recover, if at all.

Severe erosion contributes to poor egg survival and ART and the DSFB addressed these issues on the Culroy Burn with noticeable improvements to water quality and habitat achieved. Trout fry numbers have soared to exceptionally good levels since this work was performed and although sporadic, salmon have been recorded returning to this tributary. It is early days but we fully expect this burn to produce both salmon and sea trout in improved numbers in future as a direct result of this work. Anecdotally, the Culroy was an important sea trout producing burn and ART has data that suggests it still is. Sea trout stocks are very low and restoration of spawning tributaries may help address the underlying causes of their decline.

It is important that we continue to monitor developments that may impact habitat or fish in these areas. Further wind farms are planned and we engage with these developers fully to ensure they understand the importance of these watercourses and adequately protecting these most important spawning areas. ART contribute to the planning process and respond to all consultations that arise from developers on behalf of the DSFB. This is essential on many fronts, not least the planned expansion of the aquaculture industry that is planned for the Forth of Clyde that may threaten local salmon stocks.

Future priorities

Under productive mid river tributaries such as Purclewan and Chapelton Burns would benefit from similar habitat restoration approaches as the Culroy Burn received. This is to be encouraged.

Maximising output from the freshwater life stages should always be the priority for river management. With a lifecycle being 4 or 5 years depending on whether the fish are grilse or multi sea winter salmon, a large proportion of their life is spent where local management and land use can influence productivity. Most Doon salmon leave the river as S2 smolts (circa 75%). Consequently, preventing mortality of juvenile fish as they develop or prepare to leave the river may bring significant benefits in the numbers of returning adults some years later and aspects of this should be achievable by the DSFB and ART as fishery managers and advisors.

Research elsewhere has shown that in-river mortality of smolts is a major factor affecting output with losses approaching 50% in some rivers. Piscivorous birds undoubtedly take a large number of smolts as they head downstream. However, smolts are most vulnerable around man-made obstacles where their numbers accumulate, making them easy prey for these birds. The DSFB applies for and secures a control license each year in order to reduce predation. The recently published Scottish Wild Salmon Strategy acknowledges predation pressures and hints that there may be reforms in the way licenses are issued and the limits on control increased. ART welcomes this but we also continue to encourage the removal of redundant weirs in all catchments and increased smolt shepherding in key locations at peak migration times. Increasing the rate of migration out of the rivers and away from waiting birds is achievable.

Through River Basin Management Planning (RBMP), SEPA has targets for all rivers to reach good ecological status by 2027. As we enter the third and final stage of RBMP, we should see much more effort made by the regulator to address outstanding and unresolved issues such as smolt migration delays through Loch Doon dam and potentially easement of other weirs on the river. While funding for weir removal will be limited, the DSFB and ART could seek external funding to ease redundant barriers if there is a will to do so.

The RBMP process and SEPA's diffuse pollution initiative has brought substantial improvements for water quality in some areas but the DSFB's own initiative with ART's assistance, to deliver subsidised fencing and bank stabilisation has achieved equally good results. We encourage more of this type of approach and are currently seeking funding from National sources to allow this approach to be rolled out across Ayrshire which of course would include further works in the Doon catchment, if successful. Other priorities include reducing pollution, managing levels of predation, controlling poaching, habitat improvements, tree planting to ensure resilience against erosion and predicted temperature rises and easing barriers etc., will only benefit fish stocks.

Finally, and on a cautionary note, the RBMP process may see SEPA revisit the compensation flow agreements for the Doon catchment. The 'Save the Doon' campaign secured a victory against proposals to cut the compensation flow in 2011. SEPA indicated they would revisit these agreements by 2019 but to date this hasn't been done. ART expects SEPA will raise this matter again in the final

round of RBMP3. 2021 was a drought year across Ayrshire and there's no doubt that angling on the river benefitted from the guaranteed compensation flow of 45 Million Gallon per day. Angling all but ceased on other local rivers while the Doon fared rather better, easily returning the best catch of all Ayrshire rivers.