



# **RIVER DOON DISTRICT** **SALMON FISHERY BOARD**

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## **MINUTES**

*of*

***Meeting of River Doon District Salmon Fishery Board***

***Wednesday 15 June 2022 at 4pm,***

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

### **1. Present**

<i>Alan Macdonald (AM)</i>	<i>Doonside Estate (Chairman)</i>
<i>Iain K Clark (IKC)</i>	<i>Gilson Gray LLP (Clerk to the Board)</i>
<i>Stuart Brabbs (SB)</i>	<i>Ayrshire Rivers Trust</i>
<i>David Cosh (DC)</i>	<i>Doonfoot Fishings, Board Member</i>
<i>Martin Donachy (MD)</i>	<i>Woodlands, Board Member</i>
<i>Carlos Van Heddegem (CVD)</i>	<i>Holms Fishing, Board Member</i>
<i>Peter Kennerley (PK)</i>	<i>Auchendrane House, Board Member</i>
<i>Lawrence Dalgleish</i>	<i>Blackhill, Rozelle, Board Member</i>

At the invitation of the Board for part of the meeting:

<i>Alan Shannon (AS)</i>	<i>Patna &amp; Bridgend Angling Club</i>
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### **2. Apologies**

<i>Mark Colman</i>	<i>Smithston Fishings Club</i>
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### **3. Declaration of Members' Interests**

In accordance with the Board's good governance obligations, the Board has agreed a Meetings Protocol and Policy on Members Interests. All Board Members have signed a Declaration and the Board maintains a Register of Relevant Interests, pursuant to *Section 46E of the Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries (Consolidation) (Scotland) Act 2003 ("the 2003 Act")*. All Board Members present were invited to declare new/amend existing interests. No such interests were declared or amended.

In addition, the Clerk notified those present of the requirements of the Meetings Protocol. It was agreed that those present would each be noted as representing the interests of their Beat or organisation; and any other additional relevant financial interest should be declared under the *2003 Act*. No such additional interests were declared.

### **4. Approval of Minutes of the Last Meeting**

The Minutes of the Annual Public Meeting held on 28 April 2022 had been circulated and were approved. Proposed By: David Cosh and Seconded by: Peter Kennerley.

## **5. Matters Arising from Previous Meeting**

There was a discussion regarding the Catch returns; and particularly regarding the Culroy Burn

## **6. Report from Ayrshire Rivers Trust (“ART”)**

SB presented his Report (attached).

It was noted that, in conjunction with the Clerk, we had arranged a couple of freshets from Loch Doon Dam, to help the smolts get out to sea. It was also noted that freshets could be used for a number of purposes, including encouraging fish into the river later in the year – both for angling and spawning. It was agreed the Clerk is to arrange for July, August and September and to request double freshets for those months.

It has been reported that the numbers of salmon which are reported seem to build later through the year.

The Board was also reminded of the need to report any incidents of red skin disease, so that ART can let the Fish Inspectorate know, as appropriate. The Board relies on people on the river reporting if such fish are present. For example, it was noted (from a video) that there was a diseased fish on the Doonholm stretch of the river approximately 3 weeks ago, but the fish itself, if caught, would need to be examined.

It was agreed the Clerk was to write to the Riparian Owner, Clubs and Associations to remind them of the Board's Catch & Release policy and also remind them of the poster to identify salmon suffering from red skin disease etc.

ART was successful for one of its grant applications. This will help with development costs, and and there will be no cost to the Board.

ART is putting in £600 over two years for tree planting and was invited to consider a donation to ART's work in this respect (or generally). It was agreed the Board would consider as part of the programme of works, dependent on the available budget agreed by the Board (see below).

Regarding invasive weeds, ART is still working through Giant Hogweed issues (which require specialist care) and encouraged anyone becoming aware of Himalayan Balsam to pull the plants.

SB presented the analysis of the Marine Scotland catch data. On the 5 year average (inclusive of last year) there were 316 salmon per annum. The national figure last year was 35,693 – the lowest since records began in 1952. There were 446 official salmon noted on the Marine Scotland Catch Returns last year, compared to 498 from the River Doon DSFB records. It is apparent the Board's work is getting there with the importance of the message of securing data

There was a discussion involving DC, IKC and others regarding the best way to secure data – including regarding rod effort. It was agreed to continue to find ways of effectively getting data, but possibly without changing the system.

PK asked why the MSS data seemed lower compared to the River Doon DSFB. SB commented that usually people hold catch back on the information to the Board, perhaps because of reluctance to disclose the data due to the role of the Board in fixing Fishery

Assessment Rates and recovering Fishery Assessments. It was considered that the reason was because DC and IKC proactively chased the data last year.

SB commented that the River Doon had the highest salmon numbers of the West coast and it was clear the Doon was holding its own compared to some of the other Ayrshire rivers.

It was commented that there will be new Assessors at Ayrshire Valuation Joint Board in April 2023, so the Board considered that it is very important that accurate data is secured in the catch returns. It seems that the Board's records are perhaps slightly more accurate. It was commented that, if the Assessor thinks they are being lied to, they can fix a higher rateable value. The Board intends to try and engage with her in advance of the valuation process commencing in April 2023.

## **7. Report from Clerk to the Board**

The Clerk presented his detailed Report.

The balance of funds held at 31 March 2022 was £22,359.45.

Taking account of the Additional Income from Fishery Assessments since 31 March 2022 to 14 June 2022, the balance of funds held at 14 June 2022 was £26,598.45.

Taking account of the anticipated Expenditure and further income (assuming the balance of Fishery Assessments 2022/2023 are received, the recommendation was to retain reserves of a minimum of £10,000 and this would provide a recommended budget for Project Work for 2022/2023 of £15,000 (see below).

The only question arising related to why Fishery Boards pay Corporation Tax, as there was a suggestion that some Boards do not. It was agreed the Clerk would ask Azets to clarify.

## **8. Update re Fishery Assessments**

The Clerk presented a detailed Report on the recoveries made so far. There is still an issue with one of the Beats where the new owner is denying any responsibility for payment of Fishery Assessments, despite the fact that the fishing rights were not 'carved out' of the sale of the land (and so automatically transferred to the new owner whether or not the fishings were being fished. It was agreed that the new owner was to be sent a lawyer's letter, with the budget for this work to be undertaken by GGLLP to be no more than £500 + VAT. The Clerk will arrange to check the titles and then correspond with the lawyers for the owner.

## **9. Enforcement Arrangements**

A detailed report was presented by MD and IKC, who had met with Alan McDowall, Alan Shannon, and also with Steven Pendergast of Police Scotland. They are all keen to participate in the Board's River Watch Scheme.

MD pointed out that this was a compromise, as the Board did not agree to the use of Volunteer Bailiffs, due to the various issues identified at previous meetings and discussed at the Annual Meeting of Qualified Proprietors and the Annual Public Meeting. The Board agreed to proceed with the proposal and that, if it can be successful, then we can liaise with FMS, if it is considered to be an innovative approach to a difficult situation of modern bailiffing.

SB also pointed out there was potentially an opportunity to work with the River Ayr DSFB. Alan Hill is the new Chairman and is planning to work with Steven Prendergast.

The Board discussed the scope of work for Alan McDowall (“AM”) as River Patrol Coordinator and Alan Shannon (“AS”), as River Watch Coordinator. MD pointed out this included addressing concerns about organized poaching, but also from persons who were simply tempted to fish without permits to save money, due to the increased cost of living and people perhaps even fishing for food.

The Board agreed to the proposal and to fund the River Watch project for 2022/2023 at an estimated cost of £1,500.

It was agreed the Clerk would coordinate the publicity with MD, AM and AS, including notifying the riparian owners, clubs and associations and articles for the Doon Valley Gazette for September/October, the Alloway free newspaper (‘Going Out’) and the Ayrshire Post, etc.

## **10. Proposed Projects**

The Board agreed to a donation of £500 towards work being done by ART to develop the Brockloch Project.

As regards the Chapelton Burn, it was horrifically damaged over the years. The aim would be to get grant money, but to get that we require to obtain a formal report detailing the work required and a proposed plan of works.

SB suggested it would require approximately £3,000 to get a Report from CBEC. The Board approved this. SB will get a detailed quote.

As regards the balance of the proposed Budget for Project Works for 2022/2023, that would leave £10,000. CVD suggested the Board should fund fencing, to deal with erosion, as well as tree planting. He noted there was footage from 80-100 years and the woodland etc is all gone. SB agreed that tree planting would be important to help deal with erosion, but also to help provide shade, particularly important as global warming is of major concern.

CVD mentioned that fencing was undertaken in February at a cost of £8 per metre in February. AM commented that he recently spent £8.50 per metre.

The Board agreed that it would provide a grant to landowners of up to 50% of the costs for fencing; and the Clerk is to write to the landowners in the next mailshot confirming this offer, as part of the conservation work being undertaken by the Board. LD agreed to speak to the landowner at Blackhill to see whether they would be interested.

If any landowners were interested, then ART would plant trees over the winter.

## **11. Annual Catch Returns**

There was a discussion regarding the means by which Annual Catch Returns are captured; and in particular the desire to capture information about rod effort. There was reference to the Forth DSFB who use an App, but that was linked to the sales of permits, SB and IKC had looked at a number of different options, none of which were considered to be ideal, due to the demographic of the various landowners, clubs and associations on the River Doon.

The Board resolved to continue to use the existing Annual Catch return Form and to invite riparian owners, clubs and associations to utilise whatever method they thought most likely to provide reliable data. An obvious choice would be to use a simple diary.

## **12. Updates**

- (a) River Carron Conservation Association - Reception re Wild Atlantic Salmon Conservation : 31 May 2022

The Clerk updated the Board on his attendance at this event.

- (b) SEPA Aquaculture Sector Team - Wild Fish & Sea Lice Framework - Stakeholder Engagement Meetings:

- i. Monitoring - 27 June 2022, 11am
- ii. Modelling - 28 June 2022, 10am
- iii. Regulation & Compliance - 28 June 2022, 2:30pm

The Clerk indicated that we had been invited to participate in the above meetings. The Clerk asked for some support in attending these. IKC agreed to attend the third workshop. SB agreed to try and attend the other two.

- (c) Correspondence from Drax re proposed river flow calibration checks at Loch Doon on 07/07/22

The Clerk updated the Board on the correspondence from Drax and the Board and ART confirmed they were happy for the works to proceed, and to be kept informed. It was noted that Drax were not maintaining the fish counter any more. SB was proposing to arrange a meeting to agree a way forward. It was agreed the Board would support ART on this and a number of issues

## **13. Any Other Business**

DC raised concerns regarding ongoing issues of noise & nuisance on the river. It was noted that this type of issue could also be addressed as part of the River Watch Scheme. The Clerk is to liaise with Police Scotland.

## **14. Date of Next Meetings**

Next Board Meeting: Tuesday, 6 December 2022 at 4pm

The Chair thanked everyone for attending. The meeting concluded at 17:55



Ayrshire Rivers Trust

*working to improve Ayrshire's rivers and lochs*

Ayrshire Rivers Trust  
Braeside  
Burnbrae Lodge  
Mauchline  
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### **15<sup>th</sup> June 2022 - Biologists report for the River Doon DSFB**

#### **Smolt run**

The smolts appeared to leave the river towards the start of May this year which is slightly earlier than usual. This was due to a combination of natural rainfall and slight rises in water levels and the artificial releases of water from Loch Doon that were requested to encourage the smolts to keep moving downstream. Reports indicate that there were good numbers of smolts in the river.

#### **Red Skin and other diseases affecting migratory salmonids**

Again, red skin disease appears to be prevalent on some east coast rivers. Other diseases may also be turning up elsewhere.

On the Doon, we received reports of a diseased salmon at Doonside/Doonholm that was still alive but behaving oddly. Last year we received reports of affected fish during the period of summer droughts and high water temperatures.

In reality, there is nothing that can be done for these fish to save them but anyone finding an affected salmon is advised to follow advice from FMS that have prepared the following guidance in association with the Fish Health Inspectorate and report their observations to the FHI. <https://fms.scot/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/220602-Red-Skin-Disease-Severity-Guide.pdf>

#### **Successful grant funding award**

ART secured funding for £16,750 for restoration work on the Brockloch Burn in the Doon catchment. We failed to secure another grant for similar works on the Purclewan but will continue to seek funding for this in future. Over £400K of applications for the available £120K were lodged with the funders so it is hardly surprising we only secure a single grant award.

The main objectives to be delivered by ART: cleaning sediment from potential spawning gravels within the burn; erecting fencing to provide a means of managing water margins and limiting livestock access that contribute to sediment loading; tree planting to provide shade and fabrication and installation of a trash screen to reduce the probability of the road culvert blocking in future.

ART routinely clears the culverts but often we find they are blocked by a build up of farm waste and general rubbish when we attend. The trash screen will be designed to push debris upwards leaving a route for fish passage open below.

#### **Giant Hogweed control**

By the time of this meeting, ART will have delivered control of known giant hogweed plants within the catchment. There are 3 locations where this plant occurs; Monkwood Estate, Springwater Fishery near Dalrymple and the tidal pool at Doonfoot. Additionally, we are undertaking control of plants on the foreshore around Greenan and north of the river estuary from where seed may spread to the tidal reaches.

### Marine Scotland Science (MSS) Catch data

The latest MSS official catch returns for the Doon were published on the 1<sup>st</sup> June.

The total reported catch to Scottish Government over the last 5 years (2017 – 2021 inclusive) is provided below. The 5-year average for the River Doon rod catch is 316 salmon.

#### Salmon

The national 2021 reported rod catch of salmon (35,693) is the lowest since records began, and 75% of the previous five-year average. Catches have decreased from a high in 2010 and the 2021 records are consistent with a general pattern of decline in numbers of wild salmon returning to Scotland. The Doon contributed 1.25% (446) of the total official Scottish catch in 2021.

Of all Solway and west coast rivers, the Doon produced more salmon than any other. It was only beaten by the 13 east and north coast rivers.

In an Ayrshire context, the Doon produced 49.5% of the total Ayrshire catch across 6 catchments in 2021. The compensation flow from Loch Doon Dam possibly encouraged increased angling effort and in turn produced better catches than on other local rivers which all suffered extreme drought conditions until late in September.

#### MSS Doon Catch Data - Salmon

2017	reported catch	272	87.1% released (35 killed)	most – October (89)	– first June
2018	reported catch	264	94.7% retained (14 killed)	most – October (95)	– first May
2019	reported catch	313	93.6% retained (20 killed)	most – October (115)	– first June
2020	reported catch	285	91.9% retained (23 killed)	most – October (91)	– first June
2021	reported catch	446	91.9% retained (36 killed)	most – October (190)	– first March

The most productive month over the 5 years was October

The second most productive month was August and third is September (modal).

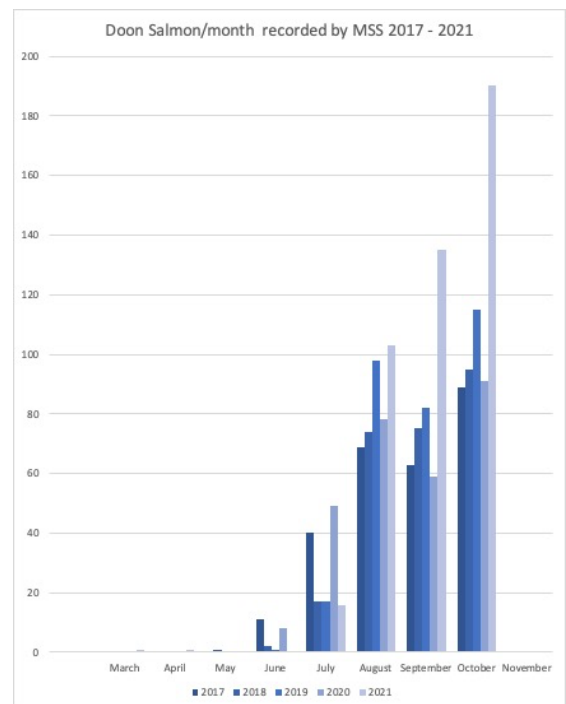
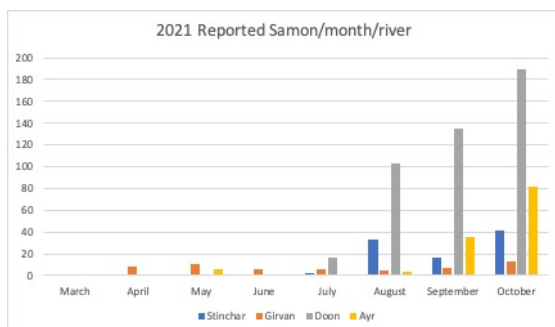
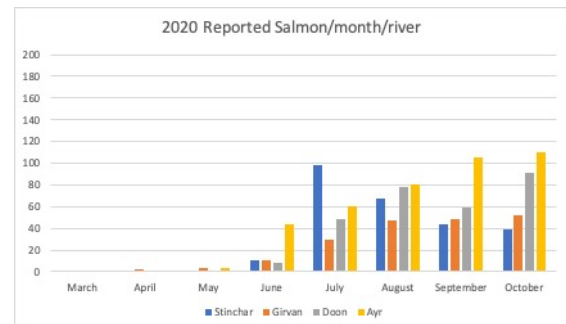
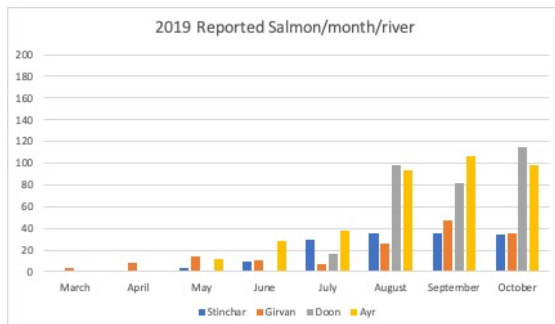
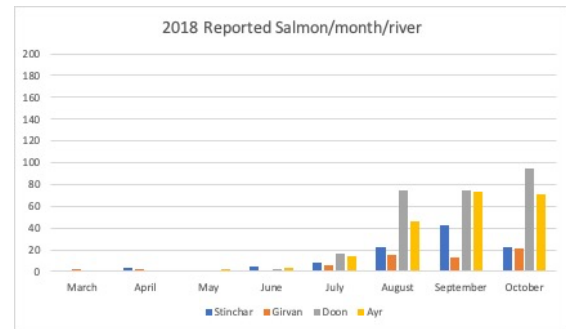
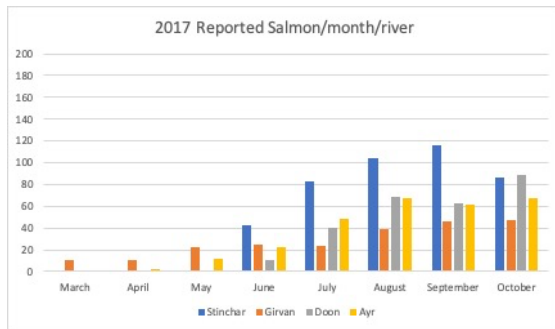
The Doon DSFB data appears to show consistently higher numbers of salmon captured than that collected by MSS. This is unusual as normally the converse is most common.

#### Doon DSFB Catch Data

2017	reported catch	250	81.6% released	(46 killed)
2018	reported catch	286	94.8% released	(15 killed)
2019	reported catch	323	94.1% released	(19 killed)
2020	reported catch	299	91.3% released	(26 killed)
2021	reported catch	498	95.0% released	(25 killed)

Looking at all 4 DSFB controlled rivers in Ayrshire we can compare the run timings across the catchments over the last 5 years. Local rainfall patterns affect water levels in each catchment differently and may account for differences in angling effort and subsequent catches. Why and indeed if there are variations in local run timing is more difficult to identify without rod effort data but historically some rivers do appear to have earlier run salmon than others, while others fare better later in the season. Genetic analysis would be required to clarify this and identify unique cohorts of fish.

From the charts below we can see that the Doon compares well with other rivers as the season progresses and catches normally peak in October. As most fish become stale and much harder to catch 3 -4 weeks after they enter freshwater, these data may indicate that runs continue to enter the Doon until the end of the season. Anecdotal reports confirm this to be the case.



The Girvan clearly has an early run of fish in the river from March onwards and the Ayr often produces salmon from May. It isn't clear if increased angling pressure on the Doon and Stinchar in the spring months may produce more early salmon than are currently caught. The counter at Loch Doon Dam has recorded salmon migrating upstream in May in previous years.

Rod effort on the Girvan is low by comparison to Stinchar, Doon and Ayr. The Ayr is believed to have the greatest rod pressure of all 4 rivers. Girvan and Stinchar are more reliant on spates to bring salmon into the river than Doon or Ayr. Across all 5 years of the MSS data, the trend of catches on the Doon is broadly consistent and increases as the season progresses.