



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

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## **MINUTES**

of

### **Annual Public Meeting of the River Doon District Salmon Fishery Board:**

**Thursday 20 April 2023 at 7:30pm**  
**Western House Hotel, 66 Craigie Road, AYR KA8 0HA**

#### **1. Present**

<i>Alan Macdonald (AM)</i>	<i>Doonside Estate (Chair)</i>
<i>Iain K Clark (IKC)</i>	<i>Gilson Gray LLP (Clerk to the Board)</i>
<i>David Cosh (DC)</i>	<i>Doonfoot Fishings, Board Member</i>
<i>Martin Donachy (MD)</i>	<i>Woodlands, Board Member</i>
<i>Stuart Dorward (SD)</i>	<i>Board Member (Salmon Fishers' Representative)</i>
<i>Lawrence Dalgleish (LD)</i>	<i>Blackhill, Rozelle, Board Member</i>
<i>Stuart Brabbs (SB)</i>	<i>Ayrshire Rivers Trust</i>
<i>Donald Ross (DR)</i>	<i>Ayrshire Rivers Trust</i>
<i>Alan McDowall (AMcD)</i>	<i>River Watch Patrol Coordinator</i>

#### **2. Apologies**

<i>Mark Colman (MC)</i>	<i>Smithston Fishings Club, 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>Alan Shannon (AS)</i>	<i>River Watch Coordinator</i>

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

Had been approved previously by the Board.

#### 5. Matters Arising from Previous Meeting

None

#### 6. Presentation of the Annual Report of the activities of the Board for the year to 31 December 2022:

(a) Chairman's Report – Alan Macdonald, Chairman (“**AM**”)

Was presented by AM and no issues arising.

(b) Report from the Clerk to the Board – Iain K Clark, Clerk to Board (“**IKC**”)

Was presented by IKC and no issues arising.

(c) Report on Fishery Assessments – IKC

Was presented by IKC and no issues arising.

(d) Consultation Responses – IKC

Was presented by IKC. There followed a general discussion regarding the Proposed River Grading for the River Doon. With support from ART, the Clerk submitted a Response to Scottish Government (“**SG**”) recommending the River Doon be graded Level 3.

MD commented on the proposed upgrade to level 3 and that it required a change of thought processes i.e. 100% catch & release

SB responded to SG on behalf of ART, in summary that Grade 2 was seen as a pointless grading for any river i.e. talking about harvesting or not harvesting Salmon; and there was no weight to that grading, as it did not permit enforcement of 100% catch & release.

Views were expressed that SG perhaps took the view that Grade 2 permitted ‘wriggle room’ for anglers. Mention was made of writing to MSPs and DC had met with Shiona Brown previously. SB had a meeting with Sharon Downie.

It was agreed that the Clerk would make a further response to SG on the next Proposed Grading. There was a general discussion regarding catch returns and whether they continue to hold up, or whether the river will end up moving to Category 3.

SB commented that there were many contributing factors to the declining numbers of Salmon in the river and noted the Board had been carrying out various works over the years to improve the habitat within the river, including recent initiatives like fencing and tree planting etc, which can take years to have a positive effect.

There was also a discussion regarding the role of SEPA in dealing with Fish Farms etc. It was noted that their personnel have been reduced to 3 Water Officers to cover the whole of the South West.

(e) Good Governance – IKC

Was presented by IKC and no issues arising.

(f) Code of Practice – IKC

The updated Code of Practice was presented by IKC and discussed and particular attention brought again to 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.

There was some general discussion regarding engagement with Clubs and Associations. SB confirmed that ART had offered to give Clubs support in e.g. tree-planting initiatives, and would even supply tree guards. There has been a general lack of feedback. SB agreed to pick up with Committees of the various Clubs and Associations on the river.

(g) Scientific Report – Stuart Brabbs, Ayrshire Rivers Trust (SB)

Was presented by SB and no issues arising.

(h) Annual Catch Returns – David Cosh, Board Member (DC)

It was noted that the number of Salmon caught was 332, which is round about the 5 year average. There was some disappointment since 498 salmon were caught in the previous year (the best since 2014).

The % Catch & Release was noted to be 95.5%, which is encouraging. However, a comment was made that the figure would have been higher if Ayr Angling Club had not permitted as many Salmon to be killed.

It was observed that the top and bottom of the river appear to be doing a bit better than the middle of the river.

There were also a few more MSW fish than previously. However, we appear now to be missing the traditional 'back end run'.

There was a discussion about whether or not Escapee Farmed Fish are being caught in the river. SB reminded that, if any anglers wanted scale packets, they can get them from and return them to ART for analysis.

**7. Presentation of Annual Audited Statement of Accounts:**

The Annual Audited Statements of Accounts to 31 December 2022 prepared by Azets Accountants were presented by IKC and there were no issues arising.

**8. The proposed activities of the Board for the next year – IKCSB/AM**

(a) Report on Expected Budget - IKC

Was presented by IKC.

It was noted that fencing was being done at Netherton and Drumgrange + ART doing fencing with match funding they secured from the Aquaculture Fund, to allow them to plant trees.

The Board agreed to fence and remove a weir and put in baffles. This was a perfect example of the combined efforts of the Board, and ART, who were able to secure matched funding.

(b) Proposed Works for discussion – SB

There were lots of ideas discussed. There was some discussion regarding the intended use of budget for £3k for advice from CBEC – which maybe will not progress at the Chapelton Burn (due to landowner issues)

There are ways of easing the weirs at Patna, to facilitate smolts getting to sea. Otherwise, they are held up and predators can get at them.

SB commented on the fact that 50% of smolts are lost before they get to the sea and it is thought that weirs are a key factor in this, as they permit predation by piscivorous birds.

Weirs also interrupt sediment transport.

Another issue that because of the Loch Doon dam, the gravel downstream is jagged – because dam is holding up natural gravels etc

SB also noted that when the smolt run, they have been encouraging the Board to arrange freshets for releasing the smolts. The Clerk confirmed that a number of double freshets at the Loch Doon Dam had been arranged in the last year.

**9. Question and Answer Session:**

(a) River Watch Scheme - MD

MD presented a Report and AMcD also contributed.

The background to the decision by the Board not to continue warranting Bailiffs in 2021 was explained. The board concluded that the current system was not fit for purpose – with the legislation seemingly being out of date, and the days of warranting Bailiffs, detaining persons, confiscating tackle, and the associated risks had passed, and with identifiable poaching activity having decreased a different solution was considered necessary, resulting in the River Watch Scheme.

The River Watch Scheme means that it is not just one or two people who are responsible for enforcement on the river, but everyone's responsibility. Through an organized River Watch Scheme, properly publicized, and coordinated by the River Watch Coordinator and the River Watch Patrol Coordinator, the Board can meet its responsibility for protection and enforcement of the fisheries in the catchment.

It has been implemented from last summer and it seems it is a success, as there have been no reports of active poaching.

LD commented he had seen an article regarding an increase in poaching elsewhere and there have been no actual clear prosecutions in the public domain and the practice is hinged on old-fashioned bailiffs

There is a role to continue monitoring experiences throughout Scotland, through Brian Davidson of FMS, who also works with ART.

DC commented that he had put 4 poachers off his beat the previous week.

AMcD advised that they had put up signs in locations where we could identify heavy footfall – we are wanting the public to be aware of and participate in the River Watch Scheme.

If incidents are reported, they will be coordinated through the River Watch Coordinator, River Watch Patrol Coordinator and Clerk, who will make contact with the Wildlife Crime Officers. We need public buy-in from not only anglers, but also from people walking on the footpaths etc.

It was noted that we need to keep reporting any incidents to Police Scotland (including other crimes such as anti-social behavior by the river), if we are going to see any response. We have established good links with the Wildlife Protection Officers carrying out the patrols in the area.

SB suggested it would still be prudent for the Board to support the training and issuance of Warrants for one or two people. We are happy to consider any volunteers to participate in the River Watch Scheme.

#### **10. Any Other Business - AM**

AM mentioned the forthcoming Consultation where we have the opportunity to object to the North Arran Fish farm sometime in June 2023.

It was noted that the fact that IKC is now Clerk to the River Doon DSFB, the River Stinchar DSFB and the River Ayr DSFB is very good for each of the DSFBs, but also collectively, as there is an opportunity for cooperation and coordination between each of the DSFBs on common issues.

#### **11. Next Meeting**

There was some discussion about the Board possibly meeting again in October, failing which in December. Otherwise, the Clerk would keep the Board informed of developments.

The Chair thanked everyone for attending and for their participation.

The meeting concluded at 20:33