**LOCHABER DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD**

 **2015 ANNUAL REPORT**

The annual report summarises the work of the Lochaber DSFB in 2015, particularly with regard to the delivery of its statutory functions, powers and responsibilities.

**Membership**

**Clerk** – Jon Gibb, Fuaim Na Mara, Curtaig, Morar, Invernesshire, PH40 4PD.

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**Board Members**

Michael Mann (Chairman) Lochy

James Semple Shiel

Alan Kennedy Ardtornish Estate

Astier Cameron Lochiel Estate

Iain Donnelly Angling Club Rep

David Gunn Angling Club Rep

Kim Malcolm Netting Representative, Cuil Bay

John Veitch Lochy

David Stewart-Howitt Moidart

Grace Henderson Morar

Tom Leslie Ailort

**Lochaber Trust Representative** Dr Diane Baum

**Board Advisors**

Fraser Symonds SNH

Allan Henderson Highland Council

Kenneth Knott Forestry Commission

Bob Younger Fish Legal

**Catches**

It was a mixed picture with catches of migratory fish in 2015 in the Lochaber region. Rivers that support an early run of fish (notably the Lochy, Coe and Shiel) saw some good quality spring and early summer salmon. These were helped by the high rainfall in the early part of the season. The grilse run was probably healthier than the previous year (albeit still fairly low by historical standards) but the drier weather that set in from late August onwards did nothing to boost catches. Generally speaking those rivers that require summer spates to produce good sport did not fare well in 2015. The Aline and Moidart were 2 such examples – both performed poorly in 2015. There were some notable exceptions and it was pleasing to see that both the Rivers Coe and Leven appeared to have good stocks of fish; perhaps the best for some years.

The River Lochy reported a better season than the year before with a very encouraging spring followed by a better grilse run than the previous season. The overall catch was up 47% on 2014 and sat around the 5 year average. There were 50 fin clipped salmon and grilse caught from the sea lice medicated smolt release programme, suggesting the creation of an extra 500 spawners (circa 1.2 million ova) in the system from the Lochy hatchery operation. As with all rivers, catches would have no doubt have been much higher had the weather not dried up in the late summer till the end of the season.

Cuil Bay netting station reported poor catches in 2015, undoubtedly due to the high rainfall during the main part of the spring and summer netting season (allowing fish to run rivers rather than remain in the estuary). Under new national conservation measures, Cuil Bay will not operate for the next 3 years.

**Conservation Policy**

The following local conservation policy was operational in 2015 -

**“All fisheries in Lochaber must continue to operate 100% catch and release until 15th June, however Cuil Bay netting station may operate from 1st May but must release all wild hen salmon and all sea trout until 15th June. Only one bag net can be used until 15th June. A record of all killed and released fish caught within this period must be forwarded to the Fishery Board by the end of June each year. All killed fish throughout the year should be tagged in the usual fashion with an individually marked 'S MacLachlan' tag to identify them as legally caught and an indication should be given to the Fishery Board at the start of every season as to the main outlets where fish are being sold in order to assist the bailiffing of poached fish from the region. Identification of adipose fin clipped fish should continue and the totals, with weights and dates caught, must be reported by 31st August each year to the Fishery Board.”**

The ability for netting stations to sign up to an agreement not to net for 5 years at all in return for a 100% reduction in levy remained open. There were no applicants to the scheme in 2015.

**Fisheries Protection and Bailiffs**

There were 19 warranted bailiffs currently working on both a paid full-time and voluntary basis in the region in 2015.

Two candidates took the bailiff exam in 2015, one from the Loch Arkaig region and another from the River Coe region. Both passed very well and are now warranted bailiffs.

There were no prosecutions of fishery crime in 2015 and no incidents of illegal netting were reported. It seems that maintaining a constant vigilance and a programme of information and education is reaping rewards. It should be noted however that conditions in the summer were not conducive to the setting of nets and this may have been one factor for low incidence of this type of poaching.

**National consultation responses**

Responses to the following national consultations were sent by the Board in 2015, the details of which are available from the Clerk on request –

* Highland Council consultation on aquaculture locational guidance
* Kill Licence and tagging consultation by Scottish Government
* Conservation measures and river categorisation by Scottish Government
* Wild Fisheries Reform consultation by Scottish Government
* Initial response to Draft Fisheries Bill consultation by Scottish Government

**Local consultation responses**

The following local consultations and development applications were dealt with by the Board in 2015, the details of which are available from the Clerk on request –

* Amendment to CAR Licence at Achnacarry screw turbine scheme on River Arkaig
* Oyster farm application near Salen on Loch Sunart
* Scoping, application and follow up for an expansion of the Nevis C fish farm
* A total of 4 bridges to be replaced on the A830 along the side of Loch Eil
* Flood defence proposals in Caol in the tidal reaches of the River Lochy
* Small bridge build in forestry at Achindaul on River Lundy tributary (Lochy catchment)

**Representation at meetings, site visits and other dialogue**

The Board attended and participated in the following meetings and dialogue in 2015-

* Meetings of Morar sub Board and the River Lochy Association
* Site vists to investigate pollution on Cia Aig hydro construction
* Meetings with Scottish and Southern Energy to discuss ongoing issues at Mucomir on River Lochy
* Meetings of Crown Estate initiative – Interactions Management Pilots – to look at impacts of aquaculture
* Discussions with fishlegal about matters relating to Highland Council Locational Guidance, an issue of access for fisheries monitoring on the River Morar and the Marine Scotland proposed conservation measures
* Discussions with Marine Harvest about the inclusion of freshwater loch farms in the Aquaculture Stewardship Council Standards and its meaning for Lochaber region
* Site vist (2) to local Shiel spawning burn on suspicion of a crofter blocking access for fish
* Attended bailiff conference held by Ness DSFB
* Attended national illegal netting workshop for bailiffs in the summer on the Tweed catchment
* Ongoing meetings with Ness and Beauly fisheries interests looking at a possible merger of our regions and an amalgamated FMO under the proposed Fisheries Reforms
* Contact with the Highland Assessor for a revaluation of all salmon fisheries due to come into force in April 2017.
* Several contacts, discussions and meetings with Scottish Government officials about the categorisation methodology used for the River Lochy and the inclusion of fin clipped ranched salmon in the measures

**Stocking consents**

Stocking applications for the following catchments were approved in 2015 – Lochy, Shiel, Conaglen, Strontian, Fionn Lighe, Ailort, Inverie and Kingairloch.

Many of these applications involved giving direct technical advice. Specifically, applicants have been informed of the following –

***Parties seeking consent to collect wild brood-stock, rear their progeny and release them into a freshwater river or loch system must –***

* **Apply to Scottish Ministers for a licence to net wild broodstock if such an activity is planned after 31st October *(it is illegal not to have this licence in your possession before netting broodstock);***
* **Specify the origin of the fish from which stock will be taken;**
* **Where those fish will subsequently be released and at what life stage;**
* **Provide evidence to support the need for artificial intervention and demonstrate that the stock and carrying capacity is sub optimal. This should include evaluation of any negative effects on existing wild fish populations;**
* **Provide an evidence base to clearly state anticipated outcomes from the programme;**
* **Provide a description as to how the effectiveness of the action will be monitored;**
* **Taking account of brood-stock removal, demonstrate that sufficient numbers of adult fish are left to support natural production from that area;**
* **Record mortalities (including loss of adult brood-stock, and ova and fry from hatchery);**
* **Report on the outcome – what was the measured effect by monitoring the outcome?**

**Priorities for 2015**

The Lochaber DSFB will continue to undertake its statutory function using all of the available powers wherever necessary to protect and enhance migratory fish in the Lochaber region. The Board will also adapt to any changes that are brought about through any new Fisheries Legislation due to the ongoing Fisheries Reform, and will be stressing the importance of retaining such core functions as fisheries protection and enhancement in any future management structures. It will actively progress a possible merger with the Ness and Beauly District as a possible future Fisheries Management Organisation (FMO) for the region under the reform proposals.

The Board will continue to aim to keep levy as low as possible to deliver its functions and the aim of this is for proprietors to invest locally in the research and management of their fisheries through their local sub Boards and management groups. The Board will continue to support this practical management of the fisheries while offering a central administrative facility (for instance in the issue of bailiff warrants, stocking consents etc).

The Board will continue to engage with all processes for the improvement of migratory fish and these will likely include negotiations with the fish farming industry, the Scottish Government, the hydro-electric industry and local fishery interests. The Board will also continue to work closely with the biologists at the Lochaber Fisheries Trust.

**Complaints to the Board**

There were no complaints received by the Board in 2015.

**Good Governance compliance**

Meetings

The annual meeting of qualified proprietors was held on 24th September 2015 at the Alexandra Hotel, Fort William. This meeting was publicised on the Board’s website and a copy of the notice was sent to the Scottish Government. The minutes from this meeting can be viewed on the Board’s website.

The annual public meeting for 2016 will be held on 17th March 2016 at the Alexandra Hotel Fort William at 10.30am. This meeting has been publicised by means of the Board website and all local angling clubs have been informed.

Annual Report and Accounts

This annual report will be published on the Board’s website and a copy sent to Scottish Government on 18th March 2016

The accounts for 2015 are published on the Board’s website and a copy will be sent to Scottish Government on 18th March 2016.

Complaints

The Board has set up and maintains a complaints procedure which can be viewed on the Board’s website. This has been sent to the Scottish Government. Details on the number of complaints and how they were disposed of are included above.

Members’ interests

The register of members’ interests is available from the Clerk on request. We have included a standing item at each Board meeting inviting Board members to declare new/amend existing interests and all such instances are recorded in the minutes of these meetings.