

LOCHABER DSFB CLERK'S UPDATE 25TH September 2025

The following is a brief summary of activities of the Clerk to the Board in the last few months. Please contact Jon Gibb if you wish any further details on any of the items.

Salmon Farming

The Board sits and is very active on the newly-formed Fisheries Management Scotland Aquaculture Strategy group. This group aims to steer a course for all wild fisheries through the current salmon farming problems. Of particular importance at the moment is the response to the recent announcement by all of the fish farm companies that they are appealing against the imposition of the new Sea Lice Risk Framework (more robust sea lice controls introduced earlier this year by SEPA on all farms). These appeals have the potential to drag on for many years in the courts. One of the aims of the group is to see whether there is another route through this regulatory problem and we are holding regular meetings with the companies involved.

The new single year production regime in Loch Linnhe (see previous Board reports for details) is now well underway in Upper Loch Linnhe. The result has been zero sea lice in the 2 farms for the last 2 springs when the wild smolts went to sea. We have not seen this for over 2 decades. A close eye will now be kept on whether adult marine survival rates of rivers flowing into Upper Loch Linnhe respond positively over the next few years. MOWI has confirmed that it is their intention to have all their farms in Loch Linnhe (Gortsten, Linnhe, Kinlochleven and Kingairloch) soon to be under the same regime.

MOWI consulted on a pre planning application to potentially develop a second farm on the Island of Rum. It would be up to 3000 tonnes in biomass.

Rather unexpectedly the Loch Long Salmon company were granted planning permission for their semi closed contained farm in Loch Long. Scottish Ministers granted this despite stiff local opposition, including from the National Parks Authority. Loch Long Salmon still have a live planning application for a 10,000 tonne semi closed contained farm in Loch Linnhe near Duror. This also has very stiff local opposition. It remains to be seen whether they will continue with this application.

Gaelforce, an Inverness-based aquaculture supply company, has acquired the site at Ardnish in Lochailort from MOWI. They contacted the Board with their plans to trial a semi closed contained system in Loch Ailort rearing rainbow trout.

I am in regular discussions with a local business development group about the potential of installing a closed containment fish farm at trial scale alongside the pier in Fort William. Discussions are at an early stage.

Following an outbreak of a highly virulent strain of *Saprolegnia* fungus on all freshwater farms and commercial hatcheries in Lochaber in May (including the wild hatchery at Drimsallie) I asked the country's expert on the subject, Professor Piter van West, to visit and take samples. His results are expect soon and may give some insight into this recent phenomena in the Spring.

Hydropower

Significant problems are ongoing between SSE and the management at Morar, specifically surrounded loch drawdown, maintenance work and fish passage (as reported previously). These are being dealt with by Robert Spence, a Morar proprietor and member of the Morar sub Board. Communication by SSE continues to be very poor but it is hoped that this may improve as the head biologist role has recently been filled by Chris Conroy who has worked for both the Ness DSB and the Atlantic Salmon Trust in previous roles.

There has been no further news on the large pumped storage proposal at Coire Glas since the last meeting. We had understood that confirmation on whether the scheme will definitely go ahead might have been received by now. We understand that there may be some issues with the financing side of the proposal but nothing has been confirmed. There are several proposed schemes being proposed in Scotland and not all will be progressed. Coire Glas is the largest. Exploratory work at the site appears to have slowed down and we await further news from SSE Renewables.

Sir Patrick Grant in Glen Dessary has been in touch expressing his interest in improving fish passage on the small hydro dam at the foot of the River Dessary. I will be advising on next steps.

The very large pumped storage scheme at Loch Earba has achieved all of its consents and permissions. As it lies well above the migratory fish limit its impact is not thought to be significant.

Other matters

The Council Assessor has confirmed that an re-assessment of all fisheries will take place in 2026.

A major disused dam on the River Loy (a major Lochy tributary) is planned for complete removal by Scottish Water next year. The DSFB is assisting with advice on methods and riverbed redesign.

Advice has been given to the two proprietors on the River Moidart with regards CAR Licences as they have expressed a desire to improve the dam there used as a fish farm intake.

Scottish Ministers have reassessed the river gradings for 2026 – all rivers remain Grade 3 except for the River Leven which is Grade 1 and the Morar catchment which has been raised to Grade 2

Advice has been given to the Shiel sub Board on issues of legality of fishing for trout in the estuary

The DSFB engaged and met with the new MaCCOLL group who are championing the biodiversity of the area around Kentallen and Duror. Similarly the Riverwoods/LochAbar Mhor group.

I responded to a concern about some illegal trawling in Cuil Bay. This turned out to be a legal prawn boat. I was assisted by the Oban Fisheries Officer and the local water bailiff Davy Gunn.

I received a number of local forest plans which were forwarded to the relevant management group or proprietor. These included a plan by Jahaha Highland Estate to restore native woodland on their ground, and also a proposal by Scottish Woodlands to harvest a large mature forest block of conifers along the banks of the Lochy.

Advice was given to the Council on plans to control Knotweed along the banks of the River Lochy.

Advice was given to a film company wishing to construct a temporary bridge on the River Nevis next April as part of their filming of the Highlander film series.