MIGRATORY FISH COMMITTEE

Minutes of meeting on Sunday, 21 June 2020 at 10.30am on Zoom

1 PRESENT:- Messrs Campbell, McKay, McLennan, Picken, Pirie, Walker and Wight.

The meeting lasted over two Zoom sessions although not all ‘present’ were communicating on both vision and sound all the time.

CC welcomed members and suggested that despite the grey hair on view the MFC was embarking on the first virtual committee meeting for SANA.

2 APOLOGIES:- Messrs Balfour and Stephen.

3 CONFLICTS OF INTEREST:- None were declared

4 MINUTES OF MEETING OF 8 MARCH 2020

These were approved with the final sentence of item 11 replaced by ‘FW agreed to participate in Tweed/Solway meetings as a MFC representative if required at a later stage in this process. *Subsequently, it was established that there was no need to tailor a response for the Tweed/Solway river basin. The questions were the same in both consultations*.’

5i The MS letter on changing the law to remove Scotgov’s authority to issue seal culling licences.

A Wildlife Bill has been passed which includes the removal of the present mechanism which is used for seeking licences for the taking out of seals. Initially this provision was not in the bill and it was introduced at an unusually late stage. Its introduction was to avoid the possibility that exports of farmed salmon to the USA might be blocked. It is thought that provisions in another Act which is in force will enable problem grey seals venturing up rivers to be dealt with.

5ii River Basin Management Planning – our campaign for cleaner water

Our submission was confirmed before dispatch by members and the wider SANA community. The corresponding document submitted by FMS had been seen and it is consistent with that from SANA. The publishing by SEPA of a roundup of all the submissions will be the next step.

5iii Angling Scotland Ltd

David Ogg of ASL spoke well on the broadcast media and to the Press in respect of angling coming out of the clutches of lockdown. That ASL speaks for all aspects of angling is helpful.

5iv Fish Farming – Report of the Salmon Interactions Working Group

On the whole AW reacted positively to the report with its forty two recommendations. However he noted a few issues including that there is no mention of closed containment and it is assumed that there can be intensive sea cage salmon rearing near small wild populations. The hope is that the government take on the recommendations which they have received but might it drag its feet over these matters? That S&TC castigated the report was noted.

5v SNH General Licences – predator control

There has not been an acknowledgement of the letter to the Scotgov minister. CC has further inquired with as yet no response has been received.

5vi Analysis of net catches and the threatened extension of the North East of England netting season for sea trout

The analysis, available on the SANA website, shows that the North East of England net fishery, although now only retaining sea trout, will continue to impact on Scottish stocks. That the proposed extension to the sea trout netting season will not take place is welcome. An intriguing feature of the net trials during the 2019 season was that the ratio of salmon trapped to sea trout trapped was much higher when the EA had observers present.

Rumour has it that the NE of England nets are taking good numbers of sea trout thus far this year.

It was also thought that a Marine Protected Area off the North East Coast of England might be under consideration. CC will follow this up.

OMcL will approach his SNP MP to highlight the taking of Scottish bound fish by English nets.

6 NASCO

This year’s meeting, scheduled to take place near Edinburgh in early June, was cancelled. Business was conducted by video conferencing and a small meeting is expected in the autumn. The many papers for the meeting are on the NASCO website.

Post Brexit it is expected that the UK will apply to be a NASCO member in its own right, not indirectly as part of the EU.

The NGO group at NASCO want a meeting to address the issue of why progress on reducing the impact of aquaculture on salmon and sea trout populations is so slow. If this resulted in NASCO pressing Scotgov on the matter then the rate of progress might accelerate.

7 Catches

With the lockdown ensuing in the early season and having just been lifted on angling in a limited way little can be said on catches. However the weekly report on the Spey for last week said that the river is fishing rather well – a description backed up by numbers. Rarely in recent years has one read such a comment.

Sadly there have been reports of some salmon developing lesions and of a few deaths.

The reported Scottish catches for 2019 were published in late April. As expected these showed increases over those of 2018. However although the figures continue to be given for individual months the geographical basis has been changed. Formerly this basis was the one hundred and nine salmon fishery districts. Some of these SFDs are now combined resulting in fifty six areas. One might have expected the geographical basis to have gone in the opposite direction since there are now 173 ‘rivers’ assigned a category which is based on reported catches. JP has asked MS about obtaining figures to update the ‘TheLotMFC’ file and a response is expected before 14 July.

Catch figures for 2018 for all fish species are now available from the FAO of the UN. Interestingly the landings of pink salmon are one of the highest on record. This came very largely from catches by the Russian Federation. The North American catch was low – it is much larger in odd years as previously was the Russian catch. Has there been a mix up with the Russian figures for 2018 or did a big change in even year abundance take place in their fisheries? 2017 was the year pink salmon appeared in some numbers in Scottish rivers and elsewhere.

8 AOCB

It was noted that the administration of SANA Ltd is functioning. Several members recently received individual membership renewal application forms.

OMcL suggested, and it was agreed, that in light of her need to postpone her attendance at the March MFC meeting we invite Antje Branding to the next MFC meeting. (The invitation has been accepted.)

A member reported that he understood that there might be treatment of farmed salmon for sea lice with a neonicotinoid. These chemicals have recently been banned for agricultural use. Whether in open cages or in well boats or such was not known.

The continuing presence of combined sewage outflows both to rivers and on the coast was raised. This matter has been emphasised in our submissions on water quality.

9 The next meeting of the MFC was set for Sunday 27 September 2020.

A face to face meeting, and if so where, will depend on how the lockdown plays out. Otherwise a virtual meeting would again be set up.