

DART FISHERIES ASSOCIATION

Minutes of the AGM held at the Dartmoor Lodge Hotel, Ashburton, on Friday March 14th 2014

1. **President's welcome to our guests and presentation to John Richmond** – the President welcomed everyone to the meeting including our guests from the EA, WRT, SWRA, DNPA, ART and the River Teign. He then thanked John Richmond, who is retiring from the Committee after 40 years, for all he and his brother, David, have done for the river including, for many years, successfully running our egg box scheme. He highlighted the fact that John, several years ago, hooked and landed what is probably the largest sea trout ever caught in an English river – estimated weight 27 – 28lbs! John was then presented with a framed, illustrated poem “A Dart Fisherman’s Odyssey” which was read out by Humphrey Walters to the meeting.
2. **Apologies for absence** – these had been received from a number of members including David Hoare, Tom Stratton and Luke Chester- Master.
3. **Minutes of the AGM that was held on April 12th 2013** – these were agreed to be correct record of the meeting.
4. **The Chairman’s report** – the Chairman reported on a year of achievement and disappointment. [a] Congratulations were due to Nick Holding and Olivia Durkin of the WRT who, working together with an external contractor, had undertaken considerable **habitat improvements**. Our redds on the Wallabrook and Cherrybrook are now in the best condition for many years, but spawning success is not known due to the very high river levels in December so we must await results from electro-fishing surveys in the coming year. [b] The Committee were disappointed at the slow progress of the **liming trial** and it now seems that actual liming will not take place until next spring or early summer. [c] The Association continues to support the WRT and the SWRA who were thanked for all their help and support in the past year. Thanks were also due to the Committee and its officers for their work on behalf of the river.
5. The Treasurer’s Report – the Accounts for 2013 which show a surplus of £1998.15, and Budget for 2014 which suggest a surplus of £1,205, were given to the meeting. At December 31st 2013 our bank balance was £18, 598.91.
6. The Secretary’s report – this report had been sent to members with the Agenda for the meeting. The Secretary made the following additional points [a] **rod catches** – initial indications from the EA were that only about 20 salmon were caught [but this number has subsequently been increased to 40], however notable were the lack, in common with many other rivers in the South West, of grilse. Additionally only a few fish were caught in the two week season extension in October. Catches on the Duchy water appear to have been 13 salmon and 36 sea trout, only a very small proportion of the total river catch which may exceed 700, confirming that a large number appear to have remained in the lower river [b] **competitions** –the English Fly Fishing trout championships were held on the Duchy waters last July with over 400 being caught in a day. The Commonwealth Championships will be held in early June this year. [c] **bye-law review** – it is likely that the EA will be asking us this year to review our bye-laws the most important of which are probably our fishing seasons, which for many years have been February 1st to September 30th for salmon, and March 15th to September 30th for sea trout. The current consensus is that we should not be looking to change the dates of these seasons.
7. **Election of the Committee and its officers** – the following were elected to be your Committee for the next 12 months: **DAA representatives** : Ian Scofield, Julian Sharpe and Phil Prowse
Riparian Owners – Sir Simon Day [President], David Hoare, Patrick Simpson and Tom Stratton.
Associate Members representative – Luke Chester – Master
Others – Dennis Mitchell [Chairman], Bill Robertson [Secretary], Nick Holding [Treasurer], Glynn Lloyd-Jones [Duchy anglers] and Humphrey Walters
Co-opted member – Mike Maslin [EA].
8. **SWRA, WRT and EA matters** – for summaries of the talks given by Roger Furniss [SWRA], Jonathan Bailey [WRT] and Simon Toms [EA] see attached Appendix A..
9. **Our fishing regulations for 2014** – see attached Appendix B, which should be given to all tenants, members’ guests and Duchy anglers who buy tickets using the WRT Passport scheme. The only changes from our 2013 recommendations are that no angler should keep more than 25 sea trout in the season and all sea trout of less than 12 inches should be returned.
10. **Any other business** – there was no other business.

Appendix A

[a] **Roger Furniss [SWRA Secretary]** advised that he is ready and able to support individual rivers with their problems as well as negotiate with the appropriate authorities on matters which affect all rivers in the region eg [i] on **hydro-power projects** where the EA are preparing new “Good practice guide lines”, which will soon come into force,

[ii] on the **canoeing** issue where he is working with the Angling Trust/Fish Legal to try to organise a meeting with Ministers aimed at getting Canoe England to sign up to the accepted legal position, something they have so far refused to do thereby giving trespassing canoeists strong moral support

[iii] trying to achieve a **reduction in the extent of netting**, both legal and illegal, that takes place in our inshore waters and estuaries which adversely affect our salmon and sea trout stocks

[iv] prevent CEFAS from establishing a **rainbow trout farm** in inshore, or estuarial waters, in Cornwall .

Specifically he is currently helping us in our discussions with SWW to try to get a reduction the amount of water that is **abstracted into the Devonport Leat**, and will also be helping us in our negotiations with the EA on the **review of our Net Limitation Order** due next year.

[b] **Jonathan Bailey [Chief Executive of the Westcountry Rivers Trust]** talked in general terms, rather than specifically about the [good] work it has done for our river. He advised that the Trust, which now employs 30 people, had a successful 2013 with an income of almost £4 million largely spent on rivers throughout the South West, including the Dart, with works involving 114 km of bankside work, 329km of walkover surveys, 400 electro-fishing sites and 680 farm visits. Going forward obtaining funds may well become more difficult, with on-going public spending cuts and more organisations competing for smaller pots of money [from DEFRA and the EU]. It may well be that the Trust will need to look at widening its scope to include work on areas with flooding problems, estuaries and woodland. It, notwithstanding some problems in dealing with the EA, has been appointed as joint hosts, with the South Devon AOBN, for DEFRA’s “Catchment Based Approach” initiative, aimed at delivering an integrated approach to solving the problems highlighted by the WFD initiative.

[c] Simon Toms [the EA’s Regional Fisheries Manager] talked about the problems involving salmon at sea. He made the following main points:

- [Since 1960 salmon catches across the NE Atlantic region have declined dramatically, most notably from 1980 to the mid 1990 period. Catches peaked in the mid 70ies at circa 12,000 tonnes but have declined in recent years to approx 1,700 tonnes. The decline in catches is evident in both European and US Atlantic salmon fisheries indicating that factors at sea are likely to be the key issue.
- [Stocks are in a more fragile state in the more southernmost extent of the Atlantic range with stocks in Spain and Southern France particularly at risk. Stocks in more northerly climates, such as Iceland, are still considered to be healthy. This again suggests that climate is a key factor driving salmon stock abundance.
- [It has been recognised that the life history and ecology of salmon at sea is not well understood. As a result, a multinational project funded mostly by the EU and led by the Irish Marine Institute, initiated a comprehensive monitoring programme to assess salmon ecology at sea. This multi million project, called SALSEA, has investigated all aspects of salmon migration both on the high seas and in the near shore environment. Further details of this work can be found at the SALSEA and NASCO websites.
- [Further research conducted on salmon through our salmon “index” river network has indicated that both grilse [1SW] and MSW salmon have undergone notable reductions in their average weights since the 60ies and 70ies. This indicates that feeding of salmon at sea, and perhaps an abundance of their prey species, may be a key issue. Grilse in particular do not appear to be faring well in recent years. This is a major concern as most of our stocks are heavily dependent on grilse.
- [A key aspect of NASCO salmon monitoring at sea involves sampling salmon caught in the West Greenland fishery. He was one of the six EU sampling scientists selected to go to West Greenland in 2013 to take samples from salmon landed by this fishery. The data collated from the sampling is used by US scientists acting on behalf of NASCO. It is used to determine how many salmon originate from either US or European rivers using genetic marker techniques. In addition, data was also collected on the biological condition of salmon to assess their health and growth while feeding at sea. It was evident that the salmon that Simon observed were extremely healthy, fat fish that had clearly been feeding well. These fish are likely to return to our rivers as MSW salmon.
- [Overall, it is clear that salmon face many threats throughout their life cycle and there I a need to promote the protection and conservation of the species whenever possible.