

WILTSHIRE FISHERY ASSOCIATION

ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2014.

MINUTES OF THE SIXTY-SIXTH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING.

Held in Dinton Village Hall, Dinton on Saturday 18th October 2014. Mr Paddy Douglas-Pennant, Chairman of the Association, was in the chair. Twenty-one members were present.

INTRODUCTION.

Mr. Paddy Douglas-Pennant opened the meeting and welcomed the members. He commented that the relatively low turnout was possibly due to clashes with another related meeting and events; this had also meant that our expected guests were not able to attend. The Chairman commented that a low turnout at meetings was a sure sign that things were going well.

APOLOGIES.

The Secretary reported apologies from Geoff Wilcox, John Gammon, Charles Jardine, Andreas Topintzis, Keith Johnson, Richard House, Mark Jerram, Simon Garnett, Dean Gregory, Wilf Charlesworth, Tom Davis, Ian Reid, Richard Battersby, Martijn Anthenuisse.

MINUTES OF THE SIXTY-FIFTH (2013) AGM.

These had been circulated to members in the Annual Report. Their adoption as a true and accurate record was proposed by Mr. Richard Archer and seconded by Mr. Robin Mulholland.

MATTERS ARISING.

There were no matters arising.

FINANCIAL MATTERS.

Mr. Paddy Douglas-Pennant presented the accounts for the Association for 2014, and these appear below.

He commented that the Association's finances were in a healthy state, although individual membership was slightly down on 2013, and that the AGM costs were a cause for concern, a matter to which he would return later. He emphasised the difference between the Association's General Fund and the new Weedcutting Fund, which he said should be regarded as a separate fund, held in trust for the members who had contributed to it.

He also said that the very small amounts of weed cut during 2014 had meant that the Environment Agency charges for removal of the weed were lower than anticipated,

and were essentially the costs incurred by installing and removing booms and keeping machinery on standby.

The adoption of the accounts was proposed by Mr. Malcolm Bond and seconded by Mr. Bob Wellard.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT – Mr. Paddy Douglas-Pennant

When we met last year for this AGM the talk was all about the new weed management regime, and the fact that in future cutters would be required to contribute 50% of the EA's overall costs of managing the booms and disposing of cut weed. We were particularly concerned that if we had a year of heavy weed growth perhaps we would not have collected sufficient funds to meet the costs. We were lucky this last year in that weed growth, contrary to many predictions, was minimal, and it has given us an opportunity to build up some financial reserves against the year that will surely come when we do indeed have a heavier than expected weed cut.

Your committee has agreed that it makes sense to charge cutters on the Avon and Wylfe the same amount as last year so that all of the surplus collected this year goes forward as a reserve, and we will keep funds for each river separate. An interesting point was raised by a committee member that perhaps we should be keeping monies collected for weed cutting in a separately designated bank account rather than in the normal WFA account. I have thought about this since and have come to the conclusion that in my view this is not necessary as the funds are now separately identified on the balance sheet in a Weed Management Fund which is akin to restricted use funds as in charity accounts. If you remember, the primary purpose of the WFA has from inception been the management of weed so I feel therefore that a separate bank account is unnecessary. I am, however, prepared to be persuaded otherwise if there is strong opposition from the floor.

Robin Mulholland and his keeper team continue to be active over the management of swans and piscivorous invaders. The aim is to continue with restricting hatched cygnets to two per nest with a view over time to reduce the population of juvenile swans that cause so much damage to weed. It must be said that results at present are inconclusive but we will persevere.

We continue to believe that liaison and good relationships with the Wiltshire river keepers is important, and with that in mind we welcome one of their representatives onto our committee. The current nominee is Martin Browne. Once a year in March we hold a morning's seminar with the keepers when views and ideas are exchanged. This is very well attended and is most useful to both sides. We end the morning with a drink and something to eat in a local hostelry.

However the big news this year is of course that our own rivers trust, which we as an association helped to found, has been appointed to act as lead manager for the whole of the Hampshire Avon catchment under the new Catchment Based Management Partnerships brought in by DEFRA to initiate improvements to our rivers required under the European Water Framework Directive. The relative success of our rivers trust from very small beginnings is worthy of celebration and we owe much to Tom Davis who until recently was its part-time director. The trust has expanded over recent years to a point where it now needs a full-time director, and we are fortunate to have found Paul Jose to fill this post. Paul attended our last committee meeting as a guest, and has agreed to join us as a committee member if elected today. I'm glad to say that Tom continues to sit on our committee and leads a small sub-committee of one keeping an eye on water abstraction issues – a subject close to Tom's heart.

It was always our intention that in due course much of the consultation work of the WFA could be taken over by the rivers trust. This is beginning to happen and as a result the character and role of the WFA is changing. We are unashamedly a body representing the *fishery* interests of owners, clubs, and private individuals. This role can be carried out much more simply these days with modern means of communication. At the same time this AGM morning in mid-October coming just a fortnight after one of our three committee meetings in the year is beginning to outlast its usefulness. You can see from last year's accounts that the cost of the AGM then was £497, mainly as a result of expensive catering for relatively small numbers. Worse was going to happen this year with very few wanting to stay for lunch, so we decided to put a stop to that and instead give those of you who survive until the bitter end a free drink! What I will be proposing at the next committee meeting is that we should include the AGM as part of the October committee meeting in future. Details

need to be thought out but I am convinced that it has to be the way forward now for a small association such as ours.

We also need to think about the composition of our committee. It has always been my objective that all of our major clubs should have the right to nominate a representative who can disseminate information back to the clubs. Owner-managed commercial fisheries also need representation, as do the coarse fishing fraternity and of course our rivers trust. I think we have got the balance about right at the moment. Some of our committee members do a lot of work behind the scenes and they deserve thanks from all of us for that. It can be pretty thankless at times; take it from one who knows!

Finally I want to touch on the subject of subscriptions by members to the WFA. With the major savings made in our costs through the use of the internet I have been able to get our club subscriptions onto a scale that is both fair and logical. It's only taken me about ten years to achieve! A medium sized club now pays us just £100 per annum, which is at the same rate as an owner-managed commercial fishery. Smaller syndicates pay less, and two of the larger clubs pay much more. Even with these reductions in subscription income we still have a surplus available, which I propose should be partially distributed in larger donations to the rivers trust and local wildlife trust. Hitherto we have donated £500 annually to the rivers trust, but I would now like to see this increase to £1,000 annually. In the case of the wildlife trust, we have been making a donation of £100 annually which I would like to see increased to £250. I trust that you are all in favour of this?

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS.

The suggestion to increase the Association's donations was proposed by Mr. Bryan Gordon-Smith, seconded by Mr. Malcolm Bond, and carried.

There was discussion of the roles of the WFA and the Wessex Chalk Stream and Rivers Trust. It was agreed that the WFA represented angling interests, and that it should continue to fight this corner, whilst the Trust would be better able to respond to more general environmental concerns, and scientific initiatives. The Chairman added that the Association was now a simpler organisation, and more focused. Better

communications had reduced the Association's overheads and there was now a case for combining the October Committee Meeting with a brief AGM business meeting. There was general agreement on this point and the Chairman said that it would be considered at the next Committee meeting.

The Chairman spoke about the issue of ring-fencing the Weedcutting Fund. It was not, he felt, necessary to have a separate bank account for this money, something that would be time-consuming and complex to set up, since contributors and their balances can already be easily identified. Mr. Bob Wellard asked if we should have separate funds for the Avon and Wylye fisheries. The Chair thought that this was unnecessary as the information was already available in case of need.

Mr. Bryan Gordon-Smith said that there should be more public relations effort made to highlight the work and achievements of the Association and its members in the field of river management. The Environment Agency should not see us as only a source of revenue. Several members commented that pressure needed to be kept up on the EA to resume their responsibility for weed removal as soon as financial circumstances allowed. Mr. Bob Wellard said that the Rivers Trust and the Wessex Chalkstream Project had a role to play in this.

Mr. Robin Mulholland presented a report on the Swan Management Project (SWAMP). As the 2014 figures were not yet complete, Mr. Mulholland focused on the 2013 data, which showed that it had been a good year both for swans and for the Project. Unfortunately it was not possible to state a clear outcome for the Project yet, as the natural mobility of the birds could mask any short-term gains, especially in a hard winter. He added that it was clear that translocation was not an option; as well as the opposition of Defra, such operations were soon cancelled out by natural migration. Untreated nests within the catchment were of greater concern, as was migration from outside the licences area. He was happy to report that the area of the River Till above the A303 road crossing had now been added to the licence, and that it would be possible for nests in that area to be treated next year.

Mr. Mulholland emphasised the need for monitoring of weed growth as evidence for the effects of swan grazing. The EA and NE has been approached over this, but had not responded. He asked if river keepers might do a simple monthly estimate of weed

conditions in their areas. The meeting thanked Mr. Mulholland for his work on this difficult issue.

There was some further discussion on the role of the WFA, and it was agreed that the Association has a fine track record in conservation issues, and was able to tackle sensitive matters, like SWAMP, without the political pressure that might influence a larger organisation like the Rivers Trust.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE.

Chairman.

Mr. Paddy Douglas-Pennant said that he was willing to continue in this role for a further year if re-elected but could not guarantee time beyond that.

Proposed by Mr. Richard Archer, seconded by Mr. Mike Tebbs, and carried.

Secretary/Treasurer.

Mr. Bob Male was inducted as the Honorary Secretary and Treasurer.

Proposed by Mr. Tony Wells, seconded by Mr. Peter Nash, and carried.

Committee.

Mr. Peter Nash of the Chisenbury Club was proposed by Mr. Robin Mulholland, seconded by Mr. Bryan Gordon-Smith, and carried.

Dr. Paul Jose, Director of the Wessex Chalk Stream and Rivers Trust was proposed by Mr. Paddy Douglas-Pennant, seconded by Mr. Bob Wellard, and carried.

Reporting Accountant.

Mr. Christopher Gully was proposed by Mr. Paddy Douglas-Pennant, seconded by Mr. Roger Fagan, and carried.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS.

Mr. David Nickol thanked the Chairman for all his good work, and went on to ask if the weed boom at Salisbury was really needed, as it seemed to him to be of little benefit to the members of the Association. After some discussion the matter was left to Mr. Bob Wellard to investigate.

Mr. Malcolm Bond suggested that we might invite Dr. Jose to address the 2015 AGM as our guest speaker, and it was agreed that he should be approached.

Dates of Committee meetings 2015.

The Chairman commented that there was a mistake in the date of the first meeting, and that the correct dates should be:

5th February 2015

7th May 2015

8th October 2015 combining the AGM.

The venue is the Lodge at Langford Lakes, meetings beginning at 15.00

After refreshments, Mr. Bob Wellard presented an illustrated report on the 2014 season, which gave a stimulating and sometimes entertaining summary of a very difficult year. His comments and insights into lessons learned, particularly in the matter of weed control and its importance, were very well received. After thanks to Bob Wellard, there was no further business and the meeting was closed.

Appendix 1

The accounts.

Appendix 2

Weedcutting dates (Draft, to be amended before circulation).