

WILTSHIRE FISHERY ASSOCIATION

ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2015.

MINUTES OF THE SIXTY-SEVENTH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING.

Held in Langford lakes Lodge on Thursday 8th October 2015. 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 members. He commented that we had, once again, clashed with members' other commitments, but that a low turnout could be taken as sign of members' approval.

APOLOGIES.

Apologies had been received from Paul Jose, Andreas Topintzis, Guy Rasch, Roz Walker, Alex Leslie, Richard Battersby, Martijn Antheunisse, Roger Fagan and Mike Tebbs.

MINUTES OF THE SIXTY-SIXTH (2014) AGM.

The minutes had been circulated with the Annual report, and were accepted as an accurate record, nem.con.

MATTERS ARISING.

All matters arising were covered in the Agenda.

FINANCIAL MATTERS.

Mr. Paddy Douglas-Pennant presented the accounts for the Association for 2015, and these appear below. Please note: The financial report is in pdf format, so appears as Appendix 1.

He commented that the AGM costs had been lower this year, and that the Association had continued its donations and subscriptions to the WCSRT and other campaigning groups. The Keepers' meeting was, he said, a very good use of funds, as it was an important forum for Keepers to air issues of concern, and a small but important "thank you" from the Association.

Tony Wells asked for details about clubs' spending on weed cutting.

Paddy Douglas –Pennant replied that the weed cutting sub-committee was being revived to deal with such matters. He added that the 2015 figures were in surplus over estimated costs, but that it had been a light cut for most members.

Bob Wellard said that the original plan had been for a three-year period, to allow for longer-term variations in weed extraction costs to be covered and a decision made about contributions.

Bryan Gordon-Smith added that some license fee money had been made available to the EA in 2015 to reduce weed extraction costs.

Bob Wellard proposed that the accounts be accepted. This was seconded by Tony Wells, and the motion passed nem.con.

There was a general discussion about what plans the Association might have for its current account surplus. Agreed that the new Chairman would take this forward as part of strategic planning.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT.

Paddy Douglas-Pennant had circulated his report (which appears below), and added that Robin Mulholland was to hand over his duties to Stuart McTeare, and leave the committee, after many years of valued contributions.

The meeting unanimously thanked Robin for his work.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Paddy Douglas-Pennant

I am stepping down today as your chairman after seven years in the job. I had originally undertaken to do just five years but the weed cutting debacle got in the way during that planned final year and I thought it wrong to leave whilst the new arrangements were still in their infancy. Happily all has now settled into a new routine, and I feel able to leave with a clear conscience. I would like to use this, my last chairman's report, to draw attention to some major events during these last seven years.

By far the most important event has been the creation of the rivers trust. This started on a wing and a prayer in 2010 and was ably led in its early years by its first part-time director, Tom Davis, a long-term member of the WFA committee and the committee's recommendation to take over from me today as your new chairman. It is worth quoting in full Tom's early "vision" of the rivers trust, which is for "Healthy rivers which are valued and nurtured by the community and which exhibit:

- Sustainable and naturally abundant wildlife
- High water quality and sustained natural flows
- Fully functioning ecosystems which link the rivers with their valleys
- Resilience to climate change and future stresses associated with social and economic development."

Not a bad aspiration, and one which I am sure all members of the WFA support wholeheartedly. It is for that reason that the WFA now donates a third of its annual

income to the trust and I hope that it will continue. They have come a long way in the last five years and now have a full-time director, Paul Jose, also a member of this committee, and under him a staff of three. Of major importance to us here in Wiltshire is the fact that the rivers trust has been appointed by DEFRA as the lead manager for the Hampshire Avon catchment management plan tasked with coordinating delivery of improvements to the quality of our riverine environment so that it meets its European Water Framework Directive targets. We are currently falling far short on this so there is much work to be done and the rivers trust needs all the financial help it can get. Do please therefore join as an individual member or donate generously if you are not already doing so. Our past Hon Secretary, Bryan Gordon-Smith, showed us the way this summer when he undertook a sponsored tandem freefall jump that raised well in excess of £2,000 for the trust.

Managing the new weed cutting arrangements has taken up a lot of time over the last three years but we now have a good *modus operandi* for the future. There is still some tweaking to be done but the basic framework is there thanks to much mapping work carried out by Bob Wellard. We are all very grateful to him for what he did and continues to do. We have, however, been lucky in that we have had two relatively low weed growth summers, which has enabled us to build up a bit of a financial cushion against the inevitable high weed growth years in future. In fact you will see from the accounts that the fund now stands at £13,200, but before anyone asks for a refund I should just point out that it was not long ago that we had to curtail weed cutting altogether because we had vastly exceeded our budget in a heavy weed cut year and had no more money to spend. Thankfully the management of the fund now becomes the responsibility of my successor!

Robin Mulholland has continued to manage very ably the swan action management programme whose purpose is to stabilise the swan population over a number of years, and to create sustainable family groupings of just two cygnets that do not devastate the ranunculus weed in the way that the gangs of immature swans have done in the past. There is evidence that the plan is working so our thanks go to Robin and his team of river keepers for what they do.

We on the WFA committee value highly our relationships with the agencies. Representatives from the Environment Agency, Natural England, Wessex Water and the Wessex Chalkstream Project regularly attend our meetings as guests, and we welcome their input and the ability we have to discuss problems we may have with

our rivers in a friendly and informal manner. Likewise we value our connections with the river keeper community where the chairman of their association sits *ex officio* on our committee, and we meet up once a year to exchange views on matters of mutual interest.

When I first became involved with the WFA as its treasurer many years ago it was undoubtedly a somewhat stuffy and feudal organisation run by riparian owners. I like to think that all that has changed now. We are a broad church that embraces all those with an interest in our five rivers upstream of Salisbury, be they clubs, syndicates, riparian owners or individual fishermen – both game and coarse - and this of course is how it should be.

Finally I should like to express my thanks to all those who have sat on the WFA committee with me during my tenure. Apart from me another long-serving member who is retiring today is Ricky Polden. Ricky has sat on this committee for eighteen years which must be some sort of record. Thank you Ricky from us all for your support and help over all those years.

It is amazing the amount of time those on the committee are prepared to devote to the health and wellbeing of the rivers we love, so thank you very much from us all. And thank you also to all of you – the membership – for so kindly giving me a leaving present from our limited resources which has enabled me to buy a new salmon rod that I could not have justified to myself otherwise! I will enjoy fishing with it next year on the lower Hampshire Avon, which, as I'm sure you may know, has experienced a record salmon season this year. Maybe the work we have been doing over all these years is beginning to bear fruit? It is too early to say but I do sincerely hope so.

There were no questions for the Chairman, so the meeting proceeded to:

ELECTION OF OFFICERS.

1. Chairman. Mr. Douglas-Pennant passed the Chair to Mr. Male at this point.

Mr. Male said that the committee's candidate was Mr. Tom Davis, and asked if there were any other candidates.

There were none, so Mr. Davis' appointment was proposed by Mr. Richard Archer, and seconded by Mr. Bryan Gordon Smith. The proposal was carried *nem.con.*

2. Secretary. Mr. Male was willing to continue in this role, and there were no other candidates. Mr. Robin Mulholland proposed that he continue, and Mr. Tom Davis seconded. The proposal was carried nem.con.

3. Treasurer. This post is currently vacant, and as there were no candidates, Mr. Tom Davis agreed to enquire further.

4. The Committee.

As all members were willing to stand again, Mr. Douglas-Pennant suggested that the meeting vote on the committee en bloc.

Proposed by Mr. Richard Elliot and second by Mr. Tony Wells, the proposal was carried nem.con.

5. Reporting accountant.

Paddy Douglas Pennant strongly recommended that Mr. Christopher Gulley should continue in this role. This was proposed by Paddy Douglas-Pennant and seconded by Bob Male. The proposal was carried nem.con.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS.

Mr. Tony Wells asked about the relationship between the Association and the Wessex Chalk Streams and Rivers trust. He asked if the Trust would subsume the functions of the Association.

Mr. Douglas-Pennant said that the Trust covered a very wide range of responsibilities other than angling, and that it had to link with many agencies and organisations, including water companies. The Association's role is more specific; we look after fishing and the interests of fishermen.

Mr. Bob Wellard said that the Association was an independent body, which could help hold the Trust to account.

Mr. Tom Davis asked to give some background information before speaking to the matter of relations with the Trust.

He gave a brief biographical synopsis, recounting his experiences in industry as well as river management. He restated his thanks to Paddy for all his foresight, especially on avoiding the potential disaster of the weed cutting changes.

He reiterated that the chairmanship should rotate on a 3 to 5 year cycle, with a Vice-chair being appointed to act as Chairman in waiting. He added that a greater sharing of the work of the Association would be a good thing, with more members getting involved, and that appointing a Treasurer was a priority.

He said that he believed the Rivers Trust to be on a firm footing, and that advocacy, the reasoned constructive engagement with other agencies to further our aims, should be a key aim for the Association.

Mr. Davis then asked what members thought were the main issues for the Association. Weed management was now well organised and on a secure footing. For himself, he felt that water quality was the most important issue. The Rivers trust, with its limited resources, worked at regional and strategic level, with a role for the Association to work locally. He gave some potential examples of effective work between the EA the Rivers Trust and the Association.

There was an extended discussion of possible future roles and models for the Association. Mr. Tom Davis agreed to try to establish a position in the Catchment Partnership and other relevant organisations.

Mr. Robin Mulholland commented on the relative paucity of fly life in the Avon system. This was undoubtedly related to water quality and was a serious issue for the Rivers trust.

On the vexed issue of “Fracking” Mr. Tom Davis said that he had recently assembled and would circulate a brief summary of the issues.

There being no further business, the meeting closed.

Mr. Male gave a brief summary of the 2015 season, using information kindly supplied by Mr. Bob Wellard.