



**Wild Fisheries Reform:
Update from ASFB and RAFTS Chairmen
23 June 2015**

Dear Trust and Board Members,

We had a constructive meeting last week at Battleby at which it was good to see such a high attendance. A note of the meeting and other paperwork will follow shortly. We achieved a clear consensus on the need now to constructively but robustly negotiate with Scottish Government on the proposals for Wild Fisheries Reform. The discussion was wide-ranging over the form and function of future FMOs and also their geographical scope.

On the latter subject, and having done some work on this matter with the ASFB/RAFTS Joint Working Group, we presented some slides to the audience indicating some very early thinking on possible scenarios for how a network of FMOs might look. These maps were to prompt debate (which they did) and to draw out some reactions from the membership about issues of size and scale that we might need to consider and start thinking about. A few key issues were discussed and understood:

- It was important for the network (DSFBs and Trusts) to come up with their own solutions to this matter otherwise we suspect Government will do so for us.
- There are pressures from within parts of Government for a highly rationalised regional approach to fisheries management which we suspect will be unpopular locally.
- It will be vital to create geographical areas which people understand and feel comfortable with and which will retain voluntary effort at a local level but which also are viable.
- Ideally solutions should be sought locally with ASFB and RAFTS providing a facilitating role only where required.
- That said, parties should be encouraged to think 'out of the box' bearing in mind we believe that even in a best case scenario Government will want to see some rationalisation of the current system.
- Any debate to be held locally should ideally be had in conjunction with neighbouring organisations, bearing in mind the implications of any decisions made, in one area, for their neighbours.

It was agreed at the meeting that debates should now commence locally (assisted by RAFTS and ASFB where it would be helpful) on this matter to see what sort of logical areas of management might emerge from discussions. Clearly, in some areas, the logic of the current unit of management will prevail, in others it may not. Equally, it would appear, from early discussions that in some areas there is much more radical thinking going on on this subject than we might have expected. In other areas people are more inclined to defend the status quo.

We made the point clearly at the meeting but can we re-emphasise that any maps presented at the meeting (which are not being published) were to be considered theoretical scenarios and should not be viewed as indicative of any specific line of thinking by RAFTS or ASFB. We were extremely clear that it was ultimately for you as members to generate ideas locally and that our role should only be one of mediation, facilitation and perhaps political and policy ground-truthing. Clearly also we have a role to play in encouraging discussions to take place with a view of the wider context, particularly with respect to impacts on neighbours.

As agreed, Alasdair Laing and I are making ourselves available for meetings with Boards/Trusts (or subsets thereof) to help facilitate such discussions and we would be delighted to receive invitations to attend meetings where you felt it would help.

At the end of the day we have to produce solutions for Government that are logical, evidence based, defensible and fundable. We feel sure that, with the right attitude, we can arrive at that situation but this may well require some imaginative thinking by us all. The stronger the case we can make, and the better supported it is locally, the more likely we are to be able to sell solutions to Government – which we believe is precisely what Government wants.

We will look forward to hearing from you, in due course, but would encourage you to start thinking about this subject soon so we can collectively work out solutions of our own rather than have them imposed on us.

With best wishes,

Alasdair Laing
Chairman, ASFB

Andrew Wallace
Chairman, RAFTS