

Briefing for Local Fishery Groups

SALMON AND SEA TROUT STOCK STATUS. PROPOSED FISHING CONTROLS IN WALES – AN UPDATE

Fisheries EP&P Team, February 2017

A SHARED VISION

- NRW is charged by Welsh Government with the implementation and discharge of relevant statutory duties for fisheries to ensure the sustainable management of populations of freshwater and migratory fish in Wales.
- The fisheries of Wales are iconic, renowned, and highly valued - contributing to viable, vibrant communities in Wales. The fish stocks that support them are equally valued as an important natural resource and we seek to manage them within sustainable limits
- The status of Welsh fisheries is an indicator of the health and resilience of the natural resources of Wales. Several species support designations in 8 *Natura 2000* sites in Wales.
- Our vision is for healthy, wild populations of fish in Wales supporting thriving and sustainably managed fisheries.

ENGAGEMENT AND FUTURE CONSULTATION

Engagement with Local Fisheries Groups (LFGs) on the status of our salmon and sea trout stocks, and possible new exploitation controls required to improve their status, has been ongoing for at least a year. So far this has been through informal liaison at which we have sought views and experience from fishermen and stakeholders across Wales.

Changing existing fisheries byelaws for salmon and sea trout is a complex issue. We have to make the right decision to protect depleted fish stocks and ensure they are managed sustainably for the future benefit of fishermen and the people of Wales.

We have spoken with fisheries groups across Wales over the past year, and have been reviewing all available evidence. We continue to do so, and when we have fully considered all relevant matters, we will then decide on what is required to address stock declines. This is still likely to include new rod and net fishing byelaws for the 2018 season, and also the renewal of the all-Wales Net Limitation Order.

We have listened to our LFGs, and have received and welcomed a great deal of constructive feedback and comments. We are grateful to all who have contributed, and we have taken full account of all views in carefully reviewing our position. This has taken longer than we thought, and the process is therefore delayed, but we still hope to launch a formal public consultation soon. We now hope to initiate this in April, when you will see the package of measures that we will be commending to Welsh Government.

Due to the complex and potentially contentious nature of the measures, the consultation will be open for a period of 12 weeks, rather than the normal 4-6 week period. This will ensure that all have enough time to respond. Thereafter there will be a period to consider and respond to representations.

As a result of this outline timescale, NRW can announce that there will be no change to fishing byelaws for the 2017 season. Mandatory Catch and Release fishing for salmon and additional measures for sea trout in Welsh rivers, which has been our preferred option for most rivers, will not be introduced for the 2017 season. This is because we have concluded that we need more time to ensure we have confirmed the right set of measures to secure the right outcome.

We cannot pre-judge the outcome of the consultation or the timetable for subsequent implementation of new measures. The serious situation to which we are responding continues to be a matter for great concern, and **we urge fisheries and fishermen to introduce their own effective voluntary measures this year to ensure no salmon are killed in 2017.**

All our existing byelaws including The Spring Salmon byelaws, requiring the release of all rod-caught fish prior to 16th June and all net-caught fish prior to 1st June, remain in force along with other measures found here:

<https://naturalresources.wales/fisheries/fishing/?lang=en>

CURRENT STATUS OF SALMON AND SEA TROUT

Salmon and in some cases sea trout stocks are severely challenged throughout Wales. Our evidence is that numbers of returning adult fish are generally at historic lows, and we have now also noted a very worrying and significant reduction in the number of young fish in our streams. This will have a significant impact on future generations of fish.

The delay in developing new control measures in response to this means that we will have a further years' assessment of our stocks to consolidate our views.

Adult salmon

- We have 23 principal salmon rivers in Wales, and, in 2016, all but 2 stocks (Severn and Glaslyn) were assessed as 'At Risk' or 'Probably at Risk' of failing to achieve their Management Target.
- The early evidence from the 2016 season is that there has been no marked improvement in the salmon run - as determined by an initial review of catches (with the exception of the River Wye). Early results from our monitoring programme on the River Dee, a nationally important index river, indicates that the salmon run in 2016 was among the lowest in 25 years of monitoring.

Adult sea trout

- We also have 33 main sea trout rivers, and 15 (45%) of the stocks were assessed as either 'At Risk' or 'Probably at Risk' in 2015.
- Stocks in South West Wales are giving rise to most cause for concern.

Juvenile salmon and trout – 2016 monitoring results.

- Our annual fish monitoring in 2016 showed a marked reduction in the numbers of salmon and trout fry derived from spawning in the winter of 2015/16. There was also a broad reduction in numbers of older fish derived from spawning in 2014/15.

- These results are unprecedented. The effect was widespread across Wales with similar declines reported on rivers in England, Scotland, Ireland and France. This implies broad-scale, common causative factors.
- As a consequence of this significant and wide scale effect, poor returns of adult salmon and sea trout are more likely in many rivers in 2018-2021, but particularly so in 2019 and 2020.

Our response

Given the depleted state of salmon stocks, our ambition is that no adult salmon are deliberately killed by the fisheries in 2017. Hence, we urge anglers and netsmen to voluntarily release all the salmon they catch.

To achieve this, we ask all angling clubs, fishing associations and fishery owners to introduce their own rules to ensure all salmon, and a greater proportion of larger sea trout, are returned alive and well to the river.

We also ask for fishery rules to be amended to end fishing methods that damage fish. In this way released fish will have the greatest chance of surviving and contributing to future fish stocks by successfully spawning.

OUR PREFERRED OPTIONS FOR ADULT EXPLOITATION CONTROL

In the meantime, we continue to prepare a technical case on which proposals for future fishing controls will be based.

Our current outline proposals are:-

- New byelaw controls requiring:-
 - Full statutory Catch and Release (no kill) fishing for salmon in rod and net fisheries across Wales (with the probable exception of rivers where stocks are deemed 'Probably Not at Risk' or 'Not at Risk').
 - Additional controls on nets and rods where sea trout stocks are considered to be in poor condition. Controls may include: slot length (a limit on the maximum size of fish that can be retained), amendments to fishing seasons and the use of catch conditions on nets to limit the number of carcass tags issued, and hence the number of sea trout taken, to sustainable limits.
 - Wherever Catch and Release rod fishing is in place – additional statutory controls to prevent the use of methods that are not compatible with high survival rates of released fish. These may include prohibitions on bait fishing, the use of barbed hooks and the use of treble hooks
- A renewed Net Limitation Order (NLO):-
 - Although we do not currently propose to reduce the number of net licences available under the terms of the current NLO, we will be proposing to amend byelaws to prevent the taking of any salmon and to limit the numbers of sea trout that may be killed. We are therefore minded to consult on a 'no change' NLO.

CONCLUSION

Salmon stock levels in Wales are considerably below the level that we consider to be either sustainable or desirable.

Some of our sea trout stocks are similarly low and in an unsustainable condition.

Continuing to kill fish whilst stocks are depleted presents an unacceptable risk.

If we are going to protect our fisheries, help them recover and ensure they are resilient to future pressures, then we must maximise the numbers of fish that survive to spawn. This is crucial, whilst other work is ongoing to restore river habitats.

For the 2017 season, we ask everyone to increase commitment towards:-

- **A voluntary no-kill of salmon throughout 2017 for all net and rod fisheries in Wales**
- **Anglers to only use methods which give returned fish the best chance of survival.**

If you have any queries please contact us at Fisheries.Wales@cyfoethnaturiolcymru.gov.uk