



EDITOR'S LETTER

Mandatory catch-and-release is likely in England and Wales unless anglers take action, says **Andrew Flitcroft**

I FEAR FOR the future of salmon fishing by rod and line in England and Wales if the Environment Agency and Natural Resources Wales' latest public consultations are ignored by anglers. I urge anyone with an interest in safeguarding the future of salmon fishing to respond individually and immediately.

Let's look at Wales first, where the Government agency Natural Resources Wales (NRW) is proposing universal mandatory catch-and-release of salmon for the next ten years (with a review into its effectiveness after five years) on all Welsh rivers. This absurd proposal will destroy the economy built around game-fishing in Wales. It will reduce participation, slash sales of migratory rod licences - the revenue from which is invested in conservation, close angling clubs, and badly effect local hotels and trade. The proposed new regulations for sewin (sea-trout) include setting a 60cm maximum takeable size limit for rod fisheries and imposing catch-and-release on vulnerable rivers before May 1. What the latter will achieve is puzzling.

Once again, anglers who are already putting almost all their fish back are the easy target, while the issues having the greatest impact on stock failure continue to be treated with kid gloves by government. NRW is at least proposing the end of salmon netting (and reduced sea-trout netting) but is failing miserably to deal with predation and an increasing number of shocking and unprecedented pollution incidents, both of which kill far more salmon and sea-trout than are caught (let alone killed) by anglers. NRW is also proposing a ban on treble hooks (even size 14s). If it thinks such petty and half-hearted regulation is going to increase salmon stocks, there really is no hope for Welsh rivers, or those that fish them. The canoeists will have them all to themselves.

"The Welsh proposals for universal mandatory catch-and-release by anglers and the banning of various fishing methods are unacceptable in our view," says Mark Lloyd, chief executive of the Angling Trust (AT). "They do not differentiate between rivers and they apply draconian regulations on the angling community while the same regulator is routinely failing in its duty to tackle pollution, which kills far more fish than anglers could dream of catching, let alone taking for the pot. While we welcome the action to stop salmon netting and reduce sea-trout (sewin) netting, we have grave doubts about the feasibility and enforceability of coracle netsmen returning salmon by-catch unharmed to the river. Wales's mighty salmon and sea-trout rivers have been destroyed

by failing government policy and regulation, not by anglers taking the odd fish home to eat."

A briefing setting out the current issues around the status of salmon and sea-trout stocks in Wales and the likely need for new controls on catches by both net and rod fisheries, as well as information on how you can respond, can be found on the NRW website: naturalresources.wales/catchcontrols2017

Responses must be submitted by November 14.

And so to England. The Environment Agency's current consultation sets out new proposals for England (and the Border Esk) on netting, catch-and-release on rod fisheries, and measures to improve salmon survival post-capture. Unlike the NRW, the EA is at least proposing a voluntary or mandatory catch-and-release policy for anglers and, significantly, three possible timescales for the closure of the North-East Drift Net Fishery, which could lead to it closing as early as 2018 (the fishery will close from 2022, regardless).

Mark Lloyd told me: "The Angling Trust has worked hard to persuade the Environment Agency NOT to come forward with mandatory catch-and-release for angling as its preferred option and instead to take the voluntary approach with targets that should not be too difficult to achieve on most rivers. Coupled with a massive reduction in netting, and in particular the mixed-stock nets in the North East that threaten to undermine international agreements with the Greenlanders and Faroese, we believe this is a good result for anglers and we urge everyone to support the proposals for netting and voluntary catch-and-release, otherwise this rare opportunity will be missed."

Mark also stressed the need for support from anglers, urging them to call on Government and the EA to tackle the root causes of declining fish numbers, namely pollution, abstraction, predation, salmon farming and barriers to migration.

Along with salmon survival in the high seas, these are the real killers, far and above exploitation by anglers, who once again are being used as political pawns by authorities who haven't got the balls to deal with the big issues. Stopping anglers taking the odd fish will not reverse the decline in fish numbers, but it will stop many of them from salmon fishing completely, the consequences of which are far-reaching.

The deadline for responses to the EA's consultation is October 7, so please act now. To view the consultation document and submit your response visit: consult.environment-agency.gov.uk and search "fisheries", then click on "Managing salmon fisheries in England and the Border Esk". Paper copies of the consultation are available on request - call 0370 8506 506. **T&A**

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