

Fisheries Improvement Action Plan for Foyle and Carlingford

2022 - 2030

Introduction

In 2022 Loughs Agency published its first Strategic Plan for Fisheries and Angling Improvement for the Foyle and Carlingford Areas. This strategy document was the result of extensive consultation with the angling clubs and federations who represent all disciplines of angling within these catchments. The feedback from this consultation guided the development of the Strategic Plan and allowed the Agency to ensure that cognisance was taken of the major issues raised by its stakeholders.

Angling clubs are the driving force behind the management of fisheries on the ground within these catchments and they will play an enormously important role in delivering growth of the sport of angling and in the conservation and development of fisheries going forward. The National Governing Bodies of the sport also have a key role to play in ensuring the clubs are supported to develop their governance, coaching programmes and funding for projects. Private fisheries can also play a part in the development of the sport at a grassroots level as well as being instrumental in the improvement of the tourism potential of angling.

Communication has been flagged throughout the consultation phase for the Strategic Plan as a major issue that needs to be addressed between the Agency and its stakeholders, many of whom feel disenfranchised by the manner of the management decision-making taking place at present.

A major issue that was repeated during the consultation for the Strategic Review process by many clubs and federations was the reducing fish stocks and the links to poor water quality and pollution. The enhancement and conservation of fish stocks will be a priority for the Agency going forward and this action plan will set out the steps necessary to achieve this.



Strategic Context

The way ahead will be founded on the key pillars of Knowledge, Stewardship and Sustainability in everything that we do. Recognising the wealth of knowledge held by our staff but also by our stakeholders will be key to bringing about the changes needed. The development of a sense of ownership will help to bring about lasting change in our fisheries and develop local champions who can sustain interventions into the future.

The four key strategic themes that have been developed in the Strategic Plan are:



These high level strategic themes will help to guide the delivery of fisheries and angling development in Foyle and Carlingford over this planning period. These themes are aspirational and will take a conscious concerted effort across the board within the Agency to deliver.

The Current Situation

Citizen Science/Community Engagement by Angling Clubs

Many angling clubs are now actively engaged with citizen science programmes in an effort to understand their river catchments better and to ensure they have the ability to monitor the health of the ecosystem and mitigate against any risks. Only 30% of the clubs that responded to the 2021 online questionnaire take part in citizen science programmes such as Riverfly monitoring, water quality monitoring, invasive species monitoring and pollution reporting. This type of work helps to empower angling club members and develops a sense of ownership.

There was almost unanimous interest in engaging with citizen science programmes from the clubs that responded which could suggest that they need more information, connections and training on the current programmes that are available. Some programmes such as Riverfly monitoring have costs associated with them to get off the ground and this may be a limiting factor for some clubs. The need for funding to allow clubs to engage more with citizen science initiatives should be investigated.

A higher proportion of clubs had previously been involved with community engagement projects such as litter picks and outreach events. Several clubs have mentioned that litter is an issue for them and they take part in coordinated litter initiatives such as “live here love here”, “fit for a king” and “big spring clean”. There are only a small number of clubs who are actively involved in outreach work such as holding workshops along their rivers and getting involved in nature education in their catchments. This is an area that could help to attract new audiences for angling clubs and encourage growth of club memberships, especially from a youth angling perspective. Angling club members have a very good understanding of their catchments and in many cases are the custodians of their rivers and are in a good position to pass this knowledge on to others in an effort to help preserve these ecosystems.

Involvement of Angling Clubs in Fisheries Development

Just over half of all the clubs that responded to the 2021 consultation had taken part in some type of fishery enhancement project in the past. Bank protection works were the most common form of fishery enhancement works undertaken by the clubs followed by fencing and planting of riparian areas and the building of groynes/deflectors. Instream habitat works and the placement of spawning gravel were the least common types of development works. No clubs appeared to engage in any natural water retention or flood alleviation measures. Funding was a mixture of in-house and external for these projects.





Funding Needs of Angling Clubs

Less than half of the clubs responding to the 2021 online questionnaire applied for funding on a regular basis and the vast majority did not feel confident that they are aware of the funding streams available to them. Almost all who took part in the questionnaire would like support in identifying funding streams and developing applications. The fact that the angling clubs do need help in this regard is critical to continuing to grow these clubs. Training and workshops on funding applications are available from many local development groups, sports bodies and volunteer support organisations. A guide to what funding is available and how to qualify could be developed as part of a toolkit for angling clubs to better equip them for the future.

Partnership Working by Angling Clubs

A small number of angling clubs have links to other groups and have been involved in partnership working with them. Local community development groups, River's Trusts, the Woodland Trust and Men's Sheds were all included in previous partnership working.

Implementing the Action Plan

Implementation of this Action Plan will take a significant effort and will require excellent communication and a partnership approach with many groups and organisations in our catchments. This partnership working will help the Agency to promote its identity as the competent authority for fisheries within Foyle and Carlingford and will lead to new opportunities for collaboration and access to untapped funding streams.

The successful delivery of these actions can only be achieved with the appropriate resources and funding and many will require extensive preparatory work and relationship building before they can be achieved. An important element of this action plan will be to ensure that the Agency has identified the appropriate staffing structure and resources needed to deliver these actions in the long term. The need for a specific unit within the Agency to manage and deliver on these actions has already been identified in the Strategic Plan.

Fisheries Development

Action	Timeframe Short (S) Medium (M) Long (L)	Outcome	Monitoring Metric	Partners
Secure the angling licence monies to deliver an annual Fisheries Improvement Fund for Foyle and Carlingford	(S)	More investment in fisheries improvement projects	Annual Fisheries Improvement Fund operating	DAERA/DECC
Draft site selection criteria for fisheries improvement projects	(S)	Coherent and consistent approach to fisheries improvement	Annual Fisheries Development Reports	
Ensure all projects have pre and post works monitoring carried out to measure their impact	(S)	Coherent and consistent approach to fisheries improvement	Annual Post Project Evaluations	
Identify sources of fish stock for potential augmentation and disaster recovery scenarios and sign MOUs with any authority removing coarse fish from salmonid fisheries that may be available for restocking elsewhere	(M)	Maximising productive fisheries opportunities	Number of MOUs signed per annum	DAERA/IFI
Draft fishery and angling development plans for all LA permit waters	(M)	Maximising production and promoting the angling resources	Number of plans produced, reported on annually	

Promote the involvement of local clubs in the feasibility scoping and delivery of fishery improvement projects	(S)	Better working relationships with stakeholders and knowledge transfer	Number of projects with stakeholder involvement, reported annually	Angling clubs, NGBs
Follow a catchment-based approach to fisheries improvement ensuring a coherent network of multi-annual projects	(S)	Coherent and consistent approach to fisheries improvement	Number of catchment-based multi-annual projects, reported annually	DAERA, IFI, LAWPRO, NIEA, OPW, rivers trusts, local councils
Maximise the use of citizen scientists in fisheries improvement projects	(M)	Better working relationships with stakeholders and knowledge transfer	Number of citizen scientists involved, reported annually	Angling clubs, NGBs, general public
Ensure all fisheries development projects are included in the LA GIS database in detail	(S)	Better information available for management and improvement planning	GIS database layers, reported annually	
Adopt a cross-directorate approach to delivery of fisheries improvement projects in Foyle and Carlingford	(S)	Coherent and consistent approach to fisheries improvement	Cross-directorate project delivery teams, reported annually	
Set up and resource a fisheries improvement unit within LA to prioritise projects and take the lead on project feasibility scoping, management, delivery and post project evaluation	(M)	Coherent and consistent approach to fisheries improvement	Fisheries Improvement Unit formation	

Foster a culture of openness and transparency in fisheries improvement works	(S)	Better working relationships with stakeholders	Feedback from angling clubs in biannual surveys	Angling clubs, NGBs
Ensure timely flow of information to the public on fisheries improvement projects	(S)	Better public awareness of LA projects	Press releases, reported annually	Communications advisors
Use angling clubs and other groups to deliver lasting changes to fisheries through community involvement in fisheries improvement projects	(M)	More resilient communities and angling clubs	Number of projects with community involvement, reported annually	DAERA, IFI, LAWPRO, NIEA, OPW, rivers, trusts, local councils
Ensure quality control of fisheries improvement projects are conducted by the Science Team within LA	(S)	Evidence-based development and high quality, measureable outputs.	Post-project evaluations, reported annually	
Ensure there are opportunities for LA staff to conduct CPD in fisheries improvement	(M)	Continuous improvement of our services to the public	Number of staff CPD courses held, reported annually	
Conduct awareness raising about fisheries improvement projects with angling clubs and federations	(S)	Better working relationships and knowledge transfer	Feedback in the biannual angling club survey	

Promote the involvement of angling stakeholders in the development of large scale fisheries improvement funding applications at an early stage where appropriate	(M)	Better working relationships and knowledge transfer	Feedback in the biannual angling club survey	DAERA, IFI, LAWPRO, NIEA, OPW
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Habitat Improvement

Action	Timeframe Short (S) Medium (M) Long (L)	Outcome	Monitoring Metric	Partners
Promote buffer strips and fencing off banks to protect fisheries from erosion due to livestock grazing	(S)	Increased bank stability, vegetation richness and protection of fisheries	Length of buffer strip created and fencing installed along waterways, reported annually	DAERA, IFI, LAWPRO, NIEA, OPW, rivers, trusts, local councils
Promote the addition of spawning gravels where needed to increase spawning habitat capacity	(S)	Increased spawning habitats	Area of new spawning gravels created, reported annually	DAERA, IFI, LAWPRO, NIEA, OPW, rivers, trusts, local councils
Advocate for riparian tree planting to help control nutrient run off, capture carbon and help limit river water temperatures	(S)	Increased shade, reduced water temperature, carbon capture and reduction in nutrient run off	Number of new trees planted, reported annually	DAERA, IFI, LAWPRO, NIEA, OPW, rivers, trusts, local councils

Adopt nature-based approaches to habitat improvement to maximise fisheries productivity	(S)	Increased longevity of habitat improvement schemes and restoration of natural aquatic processes	% of projects using natural-based approaches, reported annually	
Advocate for the addition of large woody debris to watercourses to promote instream productivity	(S)	Increased invertebrate life and fisheries productivity	Quantity of large woody debris installed, reported annually	Angling clubs, private fisheries
Remove barriers to migration, where possible, to ensure maximum available use of all suitable habitats	(M)	Increased migration escapement to spawning beds and removal of bottlenecks to the sediment dispersal process	Number of barriers removed and quantity of new fish habitat opened up reported annually,	DAERA, IFI, LAWPRO, NIEA, OPW



Biosecurity

Action	Timeframe Short (S) Medium (M) Long (L)	Outcome	Monitoring Metric	Partners
Ensure invasive species control plans are in place for all fisheries improvement projects	(S)	Reduced risk of invasive species spread	Post project evaluations, reported annually	DAERA, IFI, LAWPRO, NIEA, OPW, rivers, trusts, local councils
Promote the biosecurity messaging by national partners	(S)	More awareness about the invasive species issue	Press releases, social media posts, reported annually	DAERA, IFI, LAWPRO, NIEA, OPW, rivers, trusts, local councils
Encourage anglers to report the presence of invasive species and predators through an online reporting system	(S)	Reduced risk of invasive species spread, better informed management	Online reporting tool available for anglers, reported annually	Angling clubs



DAERA	Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs
DECC	Department of Environment, Climate and Communications
IFI	Inland Fisheries Ireland
LAWPRO	Local Authority Water Programme
NIEA	Northern Ireland Environment Agency
OPW	Office of Public Works
NGB	National Governing Body
LA	Loughs Agency