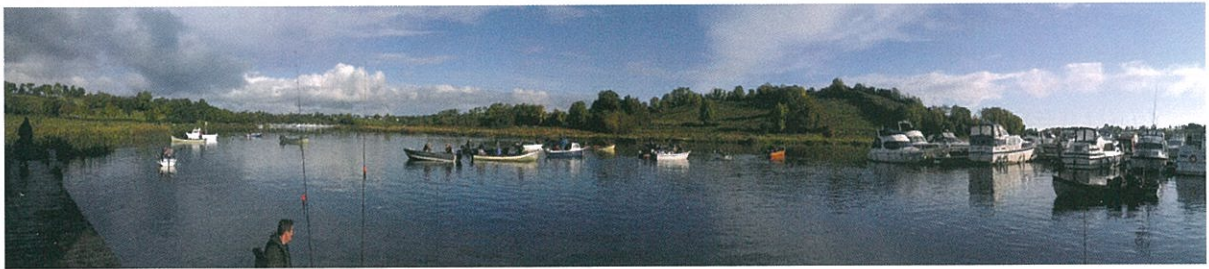




Department of
**Culture, Arts
and Leisure**

www.dcalni.gov.uk

Salmon and Inland Fisheries Annual Report covering 2012/13



Laid before the Northern Ireland Assembly under 22 (1) of the Fisheries Act (Northern Ireland) 1966 by the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

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CONTENTS

Salmon and Inland Fisheries

Introduction

Background to Inland Fisheries

Salmon Conservation

Eel Management Plans

Public Angling Estate

Fish Production

Fisheries Protection

AFBI

Technical Advice

Fisheries Research Programme

Angling Competitions

Increasing Participation In Angling

Salmon and Whiskey Festival

Legislation:

New Regulations introduced under the Provisions of the Fisheries Act (NI) 1966

Fisheries (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2012 (S.R.No. 397)

Finance

INTRODUCTION

The Department of Culture Arts and Leisure (the Department) is required by Section 22 of the Fisheries Act (NI) 1966 to publish an Annual Report outlining its activities in the year, statistics relating to fisheries and details of income and expenditure.

In 2012 the Department's Statistics and Research Branch assumed responsibility for the publication of fisheries statistics in line with Government policy. The Department now publishes an annual Digest of Statistics for Salmon and Inland Fisheries which contains detailed information on a range of fisheries related issues including salmon and eel stocks, fisheries protection and enforcement activities and licence and permit sales.

The Digest is available on the Department's website at www.dcalni.gov.uk
As these statistics formed the greater part of the Annual Report, the Department will, in future, publish an abridged report annually to coincide with the publication of the Digest of Statistics. This report covers the period 2012 to 2013.

Salmon and Inland Fisheries Annual Report 2012/13

Background to Inland Fisheries

The Department continues to progress its strategy to conserve, protect and improve stocks of salmon, eels and freshwater fish through the Salmon and Eel Management Plans; conservation and protection measures; and interactions with other Government Departments and bodies.

Detailed statistics on a range of fisheries related issues are now published annually in the Digest of Statistics for Salmon and Inland Fisheries in the DCAL Jurisdiction. The digest is available on the Department's website at www.dcalni.gov.uk.

Salmon conservation

Concerns about low salmon stocks across the North Atlantic continued and the DCAL Minister, Carál Ní Chuilín MLA, called for a range of voluntary salmon conservation measures to be implemented in the DCAL jurisdiction for the 2013 season by commercial fishermen and recreational anglers. A public consultation on a range of salmon conservation measures in the DCAL jurisdiction was carried out using an on-line survey from 1 May to 10 July 2012. A total of 371 responses were received with 83% of those expressing an opinion supporting a total cessation of commercial salmon netting and a total of 74% in favour of mandatory catch and release for recreational angling. The outcomes of the public consultation, together with scientific advice from AFBI, will inform the development of salmon conservation policy and subsequently the drafting of new legislation.

By maintaining and operating the River Bush Salmon Station, Bushmills, DCAL provides a long term data series for AFBI scientist to monitor the biology and ecology of Atlantic salmon and conduct research to develop fisheries management techniques and habitat restoration.

At the River Bush there is a hatchery and smolt rearing facility and there are two fish traps that allow counting of salmon as they migrate downstream or upstream. The smolt trap counts the downstream migration of salmon smolts at the end of their fresh water life cycle and the adult trap counts the returning adult salmon coming back to the river Bush on their spawning migration at the end of their marine cycle.

The long term data sets collated at the Salmon Station are vital in forecasting stock numbers and formulating management practise and appropriate regulations to the commercial salmon fishery and angling sectors, as stated.

The science from the River Bush Salmon Station is internationally acclaimed and the Station is affiliated to the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea, (ICES) and The North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organisation (NASCO) where the data collected is used to help assess salmon stocks in the North Atlantic region.

Eel Management Plans

In compliance with Eel Management Plans required by European Council Regulation 1100/2007, the eel fishery on Lough Neagh was closely monitored and supported by funding for elver restocking from DCAL and the European Fisheries Fund. Restocking of elvers into Lough Neagh is a critical element of the Plan and DCAL provided assisted funding to the Lough Neagh Fishermen's Co-operative Society (LNFCS) to help ensure elver recruitment is maintained at an acceptable level. In 2012/13, DCAL provided £135k of funding to the LNFCS which was match-funded by European Fisheries Fund. The conservation fishery established as a condition of the North West Eel Management Plan to capture silver eel and transport them around the hydro electric dams at Ballyshannon continued in 2012/13. DCAL staff continued to closely monitor all aspects of the conservation fishery in conjunction with colleagues from Inland Fisheries Ireland and the Electricity Supply Board.

Public Angling Estate

The Department continued its programme of works to develop and upgrade facilities at waters in the Public Angling Estate (PAE) and in particular to enhance the facilities for disabled anglers. DCAL built 9 new disabled fishing stands across the PAE in this period. In addition to this DCAL staff carried out the usual general maintenance programme at PAE waters, which includes tree and grass cutting, weed removal, signage replacement and general repairs to access paths and angling stands.

A number of the PAE waters are reservoirs owned by NI Water and DCAL leases the fishing rights. NI Water notified the Department of a major programme of maintenance work that in many cases would involve the draining of the reservoir. This affected DCAL's stocking policy at these waters and the Department undertook to keep permit holders up to date with developments. The work programme began with the draining of Middle South Woodburn early in 2013.

Fish production

Movanagher Fish Farm adjacent to the Lower River Bann, near Kilrea, produced around 140,000 brown and rainbow trout in 2011/12 to supply the Department's Public Angling Estate. The farm also supplied small quantities of fish to private angling clubs and fisheries. The Department also provides donations of fish to support the work of various voluntary, disabled and community groups.

During 2013 a new hatchery was constructed with modern facilities, capable of producing 1.5 million trout ova or fry. A dual water supply was fitted with the ability to interchange water supply from pumped bore-wells to gravity feed river water. Bore-well water will significantly advance the development of ova and fry. Movanagher fish farm was first constructed in 1969 and plans are now in progress to redevelop the older parts of the growing ponds.

Staff at the fish farm are available to provide free technical advice on fish husbandry techniques, stocking and conservation issues to angling clubs organisations and interested members of the public.



Ponds at Movanagher fish farm.

Fisheries protection

The Department continued to invest significant time and effort in activities to protect salmon, eels and freshwater fish. Regular patrols on land and water were carried out across the DCAL operational area by the Department's Fisheries Protection Officers (FPOs), who also planned and delivered intelligence-led operations to detect, deter and disrupt illegal fishing activity. FPO's monitored and checked angling and commercial fishing activity to ensure compliance with the Fisheries Act (Northern Ireland) 1966 and associated byelaws. Regular inspections were carried out at commercial dealers, fish retail outlets, hotels and restaurants to ensure that all

freshwater fish offered for sale had been legally caught. During 2012/13 a total of 69 individuals were convicted of fisheries offences.

AFBI

DCAL continued to commission the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) to provide the evidence base for fisheries conservation policy and strategy through scientific monitoring, research and analysis.

Fisheries research programme

The eel transportation around the dams at Cathleen's Falls and Cliff at Ballyshannon on the River Erne continued in 2012/13 with 145.71kg of elvers transported upstream between April and September 2012. Between September 2012 and February 2013 some 27,168 kg of silver eels were transported downstream.

A pike survey was conducted on Lower Lough Erne in March 2013 in response to concerns raised by a range of stakeholders. The survey concluded that the overall pike population level was consistent with the levels reported from previous surveys conducted in the 1990's. The complete survey report is available at http://www.dcalni.gov.uk/lower_lough_erne_pike_survey_2013.pdf

The DCAL salmonid monitoring programme, although established principally for the assessment of salmon stocks, has resulted in a significant amount of valuable information collated on sympatric brown trout populations. This information includes extensive semi-quantitative electric fishing datasets detailing the relative abundance of 0+ age class trout, whilst counts of larger trout are available from some automated fish counters. DCAL commissioned AFBI to report on the Brown Trout stock status in the DCAL area. Trout stocks were monitored on the Garvary (Erne), Maine (Neagh) and Shimna (sea trout) rivers. Abundance trends for both juveniles and adults have been relatively stable on most monitored stocks, though the trout stocks in the NE Antrim coastal rivers show a decline in fry abundance which is reflected in the decline in adult sea trout present in those systems.

Technical advice

Departmental technical staff provided advice and guidance on matters relating to the conservation, protection, development and improvement of salmon and inland fisheries to angling clubs, fishery owners and a range of other water users and interested parties. Advice was provided to the range of authorities which control and regulate activities that might impact on salmon, eels and freshwater fish, for e.g. the Planning Service and NIEA on water abstractions and fish passage issues. Technical staff also provided input to the development of environmental policies and regulations generally across government that have the potential to impact on fisheries.

Angling competitions

DCAL Inland Fisheries Group has been involved in the delivery of a number of major angling competitions including preparation and pegging of the venues to stewarding at events. In partnership with Inland Fisheries Ireland, DCAL played an important role in the success of the World Pairs Angling Championship held at a number of locations in Fermanagh and Cavan during September. This was the richest coarse fishing competition ever organized locally and attracted local and international anglers from across Europe and as far away as Brazil and Australia.



World Pairs championships

Increasing participation in angling

DCAL has had targets to increase participation in the sport of angling and during 2012/13 this was given fresh momentum with the emergence of the Departmental priority to Promote Equality and Tackle Poverty and Social Exclusion (PETPSE). DCAL Inland Fisheries Group began to develop innovative angling pilot programmes to engage with children and young people, women, people with disabilities and people from areas of high social deprivation.

The Department formed links with a range of angling clubs and charities and provided support in the form of complimentary licenses and permits, donations of

seized fishing tackle and staff time to organise and deliver events. Initial feedback on the initiatives has been very positive from with angling turning out to be an excellent vehicle to address difficult issues such as suicide prevention, homelessness, mental health and antisocial behaviour.

Bushmills Salmon and Whiskey Festival

The Department were invited by the Bushmills Traders Association to participate in the first ever annual festival of Bushmills - the 2012 Bushmills Salmon and Whiskey Festival. This gave the Department an opportunity to showcase the work being carried out at the Salmon Research Station and to offer visitors a chance to take a tour of the site and learn a little of the vital scientific work being carried out there. It was also an opportunity for the Department to play a part in the promotion of the village. The event was hugely successful with over 1000 visitors coming to the Salmon Research Station to see the work carried out there.



Visitors at the Salmon Research Station

Legislation

During 2012/13 the following Regulations came into operation:

Fisheries (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2012 (S.R.No. 397)

This amended the annual close season for the taking of coarse fish (except pollen) on Upper and Lower Lough Erne and the list of rainbow trout waters.

Finance

The table below details DCAL Inland Fisheries Group income and expenditure for the 2011/12 financial year:

	2012/2013
Resource expenditure	£2,465,344
Capital expenditure	£527,664
Income	-£521,534
Total	£2,471,474

Sources of income include licence/permit sales for recreational anglers and commercial fishermen.