



Federation of Irish Salmon & Sea Trout Anglers

Conaidhm na Slat Iascairí Bradan & Breac Geal

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FISHERY BOARD APPLICATION FOR INJUNCTION FAILS TO CLOSE GWEEBARRA RIVER TO LOCAL ANGLERS

On Monday 21 July 2009 an application for an Injunction taken by The Northern Regional Fisheries Board against prominent angling leaders including Secretary of The Donegal Game Angling Federation Peadar O'Baoill, John Boyle of Rosses Anglers and John Gerard Boyle of Cumann Iascairi Baile na Finne came before Judge Charleton at The High Court in Dublin. The NRFB sought an Injunction whereby local anglers who have issued Circuit Court proceedings to assert their right to fish would be excluded from fishing on any part of The Gweebarra River. The NRFB maintain that both a permit and a licence are required to fish. The Donegal Game Anglers have always fished with only a licence and with the long established permission of many local landowners along the Gweebarra River.

This is a dispute that arose from a decision of CEO of the NRFB Mr. Harry Lloyd to publish in March 2007 their intention to charge up to €50 per day for angling, without any consultation with local anglers or clubs of many years standing or their parent body The Donegal Game Angling Federation. The Plan dismissed the right of the Rosses Anglers Finntown Anglers and other local Anglers by ignoring the fact that they have fished legally for generations without having to purchase a permit. The dispute has seen many local anglers before The District Court pursuant to The Fisheries Consolidation Act 1959 and such cases have been successfully adjourned on a number of occasions pending the outcome of proceedings taken by the anglers in The Circuit Court.

At The High Court on Monday the NRFB sought a declaration that the Circuit Court did not have jurisdiction to hear the proceedings but Judge Charleton declined to make such a declaration thereby falling in favour of the Donegal anglers. Counsel for The Board sought an Order restraining the Defendants from intimidating persons holding permits. Cormac o'Dulachain Senior Counsel strenuously dismissed any intimidation by the defendants and indeed Judge

Charleton commented that the men were of "high integrity and good character". He held that the exclusion of any person from fishing was a matter to be determined when the case was opened fully. It was directed that The Board prepare a map identifying the parts, if any of the river in respect of which they claim to have title. Judge Charleton recommended that mediation take place between the parties and recommended that Mr. Tony Barr Senior Counsel mediate in this matter. The Judge reserved cost.

Great result

The Chairman of the DGAF and FISSTA Executive member Mr. David Magill stated after the case that "for well over 3 years now, the Northern Regional Fisheries Board have ignored our appeals to lift their embargo on communicating with our Federation and to engage in a negotiated settlement of the dispute, this is a great result." Mr. Magill also commented that he was pleased that the Judge had recommended mediation and that no restriction was placed on anglers who have fished freely for so long. Mr. McGill attributes the success of local anglers in avoiding such an injunction to the Defence as raised by their legal team, the Solicitors for the anglers Hartnett Hayes Solicitors of Dungloe, Peter Nolan Barrister and Cormac O'Dulachain Senior Counsel.

NEW CAMPAIGN LAUNCHED AT BIRR GAME FAIR

FISSTA launched a major campaign at Birr with hard hitting messages aimed at raising awareness of the threats to salmon and wild salmon stocks. Focussing on what FISSTA describes as 'The incredible wild salmon - Ireland's silvery inheritance' the campaign's excellent leaflets graphically include details of:

- The deadly parasite from fish farms: sea lice - a threat to the recovery of Ireland's wild salmon.
- Wild Atlantic salmon - caught in the Irish draftnet or do we conserve?
- Escaped villains from fish farms - deteriorating wild salmon stocks.

(Editor's note: These leaflets should be required reading for anyone that cares even slightly about our native stock)

For thousands of years the salmon has fascinated people with its dual life in rivers and the sea, and with its fantastic ability to force a way up rivers, wild rapids and waterfalls.

The salmon has a nomadic life cycle, migrating to the sea as a smolt after 2 - 5 years in its native river and then returning to start the next cycle of new generations of salmon. The migration to the sea starts during early spring time when the sea temperature is around 8°C. It remains a mystery how the smolts, far up the rivers, know when to begin their journey. Smolts are very vulnerable during this period and numerous are eaten by predators including birds and other fish.

Additionally, when they reach the sea, smolts face serious infectious threats from the sea lice population. At present, only 2 - 5% of migrating smolts return to their rivers as adult salmon.

The salmon stay in the North Atlantic for 1 - 3 years, feeding mainly off the coasts of Greenland and the Faroe Islands in the Atlantic Ocean before they return to their native rivers. Incredibly, they even find their exact pool or stretch of river where they hatched and grew up. This is after a sea journey of more than 5,000 kilometres and then often a battle with strong rapids in rivers and the necessity to leap waterfalls of 4 metres.

Nobody appears to know exactly how the salmon find their way back to the rivers. A combination of magnetic iron in their body sideline and brain, in addition to a strong sense of smell could play an important part. The first salmon show up in the rivers in early springtime and spawning takes place during October to January.

The size of the salmon is quite impressive - they can reach up to 1.5 metres and weigh more than 30 kilograms. The cock salmon (male) is normally bigger than the hen fish (female) which is seldom over 20 kilos. The longer the salmon has been in the sea the larger it becomes. The largest rod-caught salmon was caught on the Tana River, Norway and topped the scales at 35.89 kilos or over 70 lbs. The largest rod caught salmon by a woman was 63 lbs in 1921 in UK.

Smaller salmon stay in the sea for one year (one winter salmon or grilse) and gain around 1 - 3 kilos in weight. Salmon over 7 kilos are regarded as large salmon (three winter salmon).

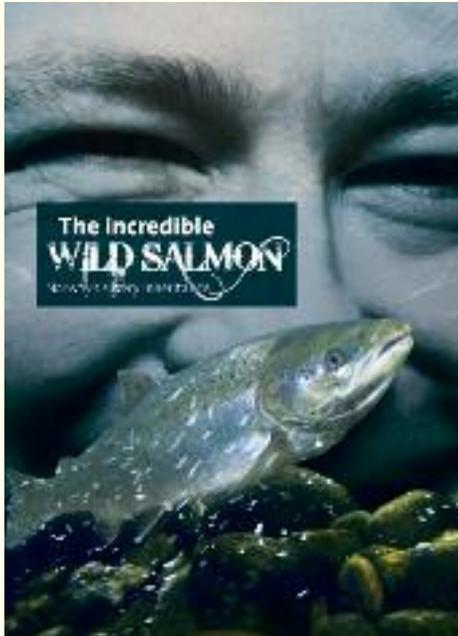
Fishing for salmon is a popular sport and leisure pursuit and between 30,000 - 50,000 anglers fished for salmon and sea trout in Irish rivers until the recent decline due to restrictions and the rod license fee increases (from €28 to €135 per season). This activity brought in more than €70m. to the rural economy representing the equivalent of 2,000 jobs annually.

Wild salmon meet numerous challenges

The decline in wild salmon stocks in Ireland and countries surrounding the North Atlantic Ocean is very alarming. Stocks have reduced by more than 80% during the last 30 years. Salmon is now extinct in 11 countries. Historically, it is different forms of river developments (hydro power stations, barriers, gravel excavation etc) in addition to environmental pollution and acid rain that have wiped out salmon stocks around the North Atlantic Ocean. The major threats for the wild salmon in Ireland today are:

The commercial draftnetting of salmon which must end now as August extensions ruin any recovery chance

Sea lice: a seriously increasing threat to migrating smolt due to intensive fish farming



Escaped farmed salmon: significant problem due to genetic interference with wild spawning stocks

The lack of protection and the licensing of draftnetting in closed rivers

The danger to Ireland from diseases such as Gyrodactylus salaris: GS is deadly parasite killing fry, parr and smolt destroying a number of Norwegian salmon rivers, of fish farms import eggs/ova that could spread ISA & GS.

Acid rain: affected water quality and destroyed stocks but

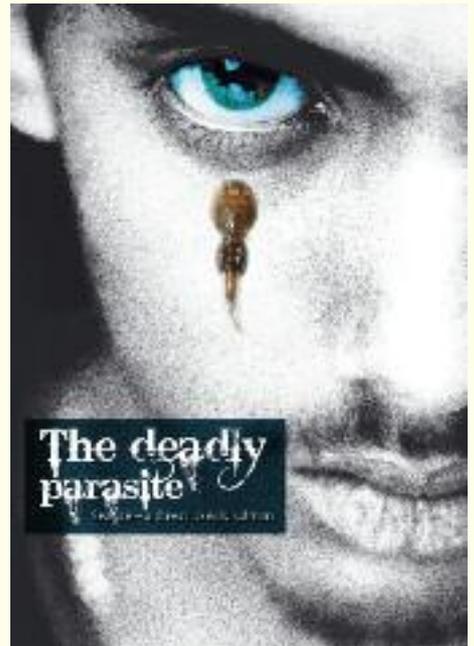
improvements due to lime treatment

River water regulation: numerous salmon stocks affected and threatened by large and small ESB hydro power stations

Overfishing: draft or estuary netting of wild salmon stocks

Pelagic fisheries: 'hidden' catches of juvenile salmon when trawlers fish for other fish in the North Atlantic Sea

Global climate: dramatic changes in the food supply in the Atlantic due to temperature increase.



Sea lice from fish farms- lethal to wild salmon and sea trout

More than 30 fish farms, positioned along the Irish coast, hold millions of farmed salmon in their pens. In comparison, the total numbers of wild salmon returning to Irish rivers are under a quarter of a million.

Sea lice occur naturally in sea water and prior to fish farming, were not of any significant threat to wild salmon, sea trout and arctic char. However, because of the enormous numbers of salmon and rainbow trout held in fish farms throughout the year, an abnormally high sea lice concentration has developed in salmon estuaries and coastal areas where there is fish farming. Fish that escape from the fish farms add to the spread of sea lice.

When young salmon called smolts leave their rivers and migrate to the oceans to feed they pass numerous fish farms on their way. If the farmed fish areas contain extensive numbers of sea lice during the spring and early summer (critical migration period) the smolts have to make their way through a significant concentration of sea lice who latch on to their bodies. Sea lice attach themselves to the skin and large numbers of smolt die due to lesions and infections. Evidence of this has been found far out in the North Atlantic. (Prime Time report RTE 2003.) Some areas on the west coast of Norway have experienced up to 95% fatality of migrating smolt due to sea lice and Ireland may not be much different.

Resistant sea lice are a threat to the wild salmon

Chemical treatments are mainly used to contain the populations of sea lice in fish farms. Some remedies are mixed with the fish feed while others are placed directly in the water in the pens. Major concern has arisen as in parts of the fish farming areas the sea lice have become resistant to treatment. This situation is bound to increase in severity if resistant sea lice continue to spread to new fish farms further afield. Without effective treatment, the sea lice population is set to explode. If this happens it will have grave consequences for the wild salmon and sea trout stocks in Norway

Sea lice

Sea lice (*Lepeophtheirus salmonis*) are parasites that exist on slime, skin and blood from salmonoids. Sea lice only survive when the host is in salt water. Lice have always existed

naturally on salmon, sea trout and arctic char without being any lethal threat to the wild fish.

New action and increased effort against sea lice

The threat against wild salmon and sea trout stocks is already very serious. With increased resistance to treatment and the increasing number of fish farming licences, the sea lice situation can turn out to be dire. The Government should, with no time to lose, implement all actions that the strategy for sustainable aquaculture puts forward. FISSTA - the Irish Salmon & Seatrout Anglers and CARA na MARA are in joint agreement about the demand for increased action against sea lice:

The world producer of farmed salmon, Marine Harvest's Chairman John Frederiksen admitted in 2007 that there should be no farm cages in

wild salmon habitats. But to date the damage to wild salmon continues. Licensing for new fish farms to produce salmon and trout should stop until a new and dedicated action plan to fight the sea lice is approved and implemented. Eg; so that farm waste is treated by closed containment.

DAFF & DCENR Departments of Agriculture, Fisheries & Food and Natural Resources and Environment authorities should enforce action against official data on sea lice populations at offending farms to protect the wild salmon and sea trout. Eg. delice and abandon fish cages/pens to eliminate contamination.

The use of giant pens that prevent effective sea lice counts and direct sea treatment of farm waste should be banned.

There should be an evaluation of the need to introduce smolt migration corridors in national salmon waters during critical periods (Jan to May) in order to improve sea mortality of smolts.

THE TIMES THEY ARE A CHANGING

The spring salmon run in most rivers may have shown a small improvement this year there is no doubt that most fisheries report the same story that our summer grilse run has collapsed this season. Those that have arrived seem to be very small and as we say in Donegal 'of the sharpening stone variety.' There are many reasons put forward for this but the most common is the toll that has been exacted by the many years of sustained driftnetting of the resource during the months of June and July, while August also has appearances of little improvement so far.

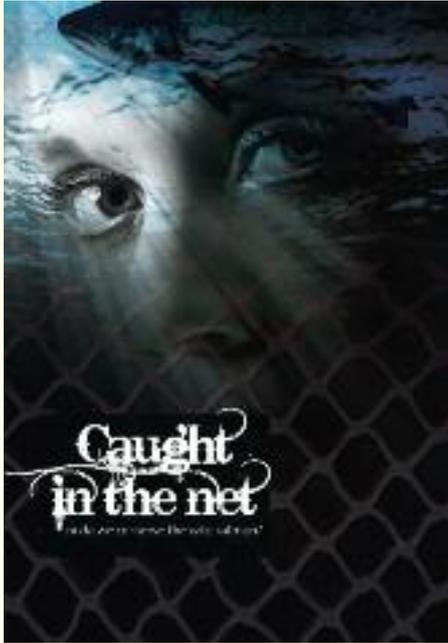
There are of course the usual exceptions where some private fisheries are concerned along with the Moy system where tourism seems to play a large part in landing statistics. But that is a matter for another day when the complete season will be reviewed. For now, we must confront the main issues as our members present them for our Federation to take action on immediately.

The most recent National Executive Council meeting of FISSTA was held on 26 July in Birr County Arms Hotel where a mid season review of the fisheries performance and management was discussed in detail. There was anger at the extensions into 15 August despite the many, many representations made to the Minister on this very sensitive issue.

We have been told on numerous occasions that FISSTA are the only angling body taking issue with these extensions as they are bound by the allocated quotas which seems to satisfy most except FISSTA anglers. Yet, how can a minister extend the snap netting on the majestic waters of the Nore to the 22 August when he limited the angling to catch and release in June and July. The scientists advice can be ignored or skewed to suit the commercials against the salmon and that is only conclusion to what is an appalling state of affairs and confirms why we need to revive the campaign to end commercial netting of all salmon until we return our rivers to abundance. How can the extensions on the lower Lee, Bandon, Illen, Roughty, Sneem, Carragh, Laune (including the Cottoners), Kerry Owenmore, Sheen, Inney, Owenduff, Mayo Owenmore and Newport be justified at a time when we all (except the scientists) know the August or backend fish are the backbone of the spawning programmes in these rivers.

Further studies not needed

At a recent meeting between FISSTA and the Central Fisheries Board on this issue the CEO Ciaran Byrne (and new CEO of Inland Fisheries Ireland) queried the very existence of such a run scientifically as the backend or autumn fish but assured us he would conduct research into 'your theory.'



We stated that no further studies were needed to establish the very facts that anglers on the ground have observed for generations. It is another example of the academia who advise the powers having to emerge from their labs to check our watch, and confirm we can tell the time. We are very glad that our strong opposition to the changing of the Feale netting guard were not rewarded once again with an extension, but that is only a small victory in what is an absolute and total abuse of our very limited resource.

Disregard discussed

This disregard for any semblance of management of our salmon was discussed and many proposals were explored and some long and short term were agreed. The most immediate was to devise and launch a new campaign against the commercial netting, fish farming and state mismanagement of our wild salmon resource and a sample of the 4 issues to made into brochures is enclosed overleaf.

The members got a detailed report on the NASCO ANNUAL CONFERENCE held in Norway in June which allowed us to partner the Norwegian salmon anglers in their campaign at NASCO. The meeting at NASCO allowed FISSTA to seek clarification on the Kilkenny presentation by Paddy Gargan as reported in the last issue when he stated that log book stats were not being considered any longer for river with fish recorded fewer than ten.

A summary of the "Diversification of inland fisheries in our communities" report to the Joint Oireachtas Committee by Joe Mc Hugh TD which stimulated the debate. There was also the salmon issues to be discussed at the forthcoming General Assembly of European Anglers Alliance and it is hoped we can get them to adopt our salmon policy at that meeting at the end of August.

FISHERIES AWARENESS WEEK 2009

We are indebted to our Angling clubs, tackle shops and casting instructors for helping FISSTA raise awareness of angling and the environment in Ireland. The goal has been to encourage first time adults and parents to take their children and teenagers on to their local waters to find out more about fishing and to pick up a rod and get started.

FISSTA have already completed their own club youth and newcomer angling programmes for this season culminating in some participants from Kerry schools attending free coaching lessons at the Birr Game fair on 22 August under the able direction of International flycaster champion Robert Gillespie.

We welcome the new initiative to join in by the Central and Regional Fisheries Boards who will organise 20 free angling events which will take place from Saturday 29 August to the following Saturday 5 September 2009. It is hoped the timing will coordinate with the FISSTA May to July programme for 2010 when Inland Fisheries Ireland will be the new body to assist us in introducing more would be anglers to the sport.

