



Suggested conservation policy for salmon and sea trout

March 2025

Background

In December 2023 Atlantic salmon were reclassified by the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, from 'Least Concern' to 'Endangered' in Great Britain. Whilst this reclassification is alarming, it also backs up our long-standing call for greater and faster action to protect and restore wild salmon.

This development, alongside continuing declines in catches, led the Fisheries Management Scotland board to consider whether a new approach should be discussed with members of FMS and adopted for the 2025 season. A proposal to adopt a voluntary policy of no *deliberate* killing of wild salmon or sea trout was discussed and agreed at the 2024 AGM.

It is recognised that some members remain concerned about the unintended consequences of adopting this position, such as the introduction of expanded statutory measures. It was agreed that it is essential for Scotland to continue to lead the way in demonstrating the importance of voluntary catch and release as a conservation measure. The clear purpose of this recommendation is to support efforts to achieve thriving populations of wild salmon and sea trout, while ensuring that social and economic benefits of freshwater fisheries continue to support employment in local economies.

Before 31 March no wild salmon may be retained in any Scottish river, in order to protect the fragile spring fish population. The majority of rivers (117 out of 173) are designated as poor status for salmon (Grade 3) and in these rivers no wild salmon may be retained at any time.

Fisheries Management Scotland recognises that managers, proprietors and anglers have been extremely pro-active, and conscientious, in delivering conservation policies that go well beyond statutory measures. A number of rivers have adopted proactive conservation policies with a view to achieving 100% catch and release. Indeed, only 8% of the total rod catch of salmon in 2023 were from areas classified as in poor status (Grade 3). The vast majority of caught and released fish were from Grade 1 and Grade 2 rivers.

The reclassification of Atlantic salmon by the IUCN to 'endangered' is a significant development. Fisheries managers and proprietors should be conscious that the taking of a species with this status is likely to face increased scrutiny from decision makers and the general public.

Recommendation

The Fisheries Management Scotland Board recommends the following to all DSFBs and the River Tweed Commission.

- 1. That all DSFBs and proprietors of salmon fisheries in Scotland adopt a policy of no deliberate killing of wild Atlantic salmon for their fisheries for so long as the IUCN considers GB populations of salmon to be endangered.***

2. ***That all DSFBs and proprietors of sea trout fisheries in Scotland adopt a policy of no deliberate killing of sea trout for their fisheries, such advice to be reviewed when the balance of scientific evidence suggests that populations are stable and recovering.***

In making this recommendation, we understand that a small proportion of salmon or sea trout will not survive capture. We have therefore used the term 'deliberate killing' to recognise this important point. We would emphasise that this is a recommendation, not a regulation, and not a precursor to further legal measures. Indeed, we are of the view that a voluntary approach to conservation is likely to be more effective than further legal measures.