

Senior Fisheries officer Report in Brief River Ythan Board meeting 10th of Feb 2026

Consultations/Fish Barriers

SEPA Consultation-Barrier to Fish passage.

On the 14th of March I was contacted by SEPA who were working on a barrier to fish passage, I was not aware of this barrier. The barrier was a high step before entering a culvert on the Ebrie burn. After visiting the site, I discussed the best option to improve passage to all fish species with the Senior ecologist at SEPA. We decided the best opinion, would be to place a small Pre-weir 2-3 Meters below the step. By doing this it will increase the water level at the step and allow fish passage more easily.

Mill of Elrick-concerns

At the last board meeting I had expressed concerns related to water abstraction, a board had been placed into the main channel of the Ebrie burn, which would push a higher volume of water over to the hydro water intake. I revisited in May and found that the board had been removed. Since this board has been removed, ample water is now able to flow through the depleted stretch between the intake and outflow point. The obstruction it was causing to fish passage during low flows has now been removed.

Obstructions to Fish passage Removed or Eased

Over the 2025 season, there were several obstructions surveyed and removed or eased.

Littewater

An accumulation of tree debris had built up after harvesting operations, these were removed.

Fourdon burn

Tree stumps and concrete blocks along with corrugated Iron sheets were removed from the fish pass beside the Village of Fyvie. Further up the Fourdon burn, a very well-made bridge crossing was erected, this was causing an obstruction to the smolt migration and removed by staff.

Methlick

On the Haddo stretch of River, just upstream of Lovies bridge, a large windblown willow tree had fallen across the river, luckily it had fallen on shallow water. This tree was cut and removed.

Ranunculus Weed Cutting

Ebrie Burn

On the Ebrie burn, 10 sites were chosen, where Ranunculus weed was interfering with the spawning gravel, trapping fine sediment at the roots of the plant, which in turn was then smothering the spawning substrate. At times it's a race against time to get the sections cut before the flower of the plant goes to seed. All selected sections were completed in good time.

Burn of Fortree

The Burn of Fortree is a tributary of the Ebrie burn, in the middle to upper catchment. A few years ago, this small feeder stream was dredged by the farmer, removing all features and aquatic material.

In 2024 there was no sign of Ranunculus, last year it was bank to bank thick, so dense you could not see water flowing in the stream. As all other forms of aquatic plant life had been removed, this plant just took over. The stretch I cut took two days to cut and remove the weed from the water course. While cutting I saw small pockets of small fry darting around and holding in the flow that was created once the weed was cleared.

Fourdon Burn

While surveying for obstructions on the middle reaches of the Fourdon burn, I came across Ranunculus weed on one of our Redd counting sites. This was then cleared of Ranunculus in the month of August.

Gravel Washing-Seggat

The gravel washing on the Chappel of Seggat was completed in good time within the allocated days. I was hoping for great results as the site was at Fyvie, which is a good distance further downstream. Unfortunately, this was not the case, with only minimal disturbance of the gravel by salmonids. Of course, there could be many reasons for this, looking at the season just past, with very long dry periods with water scarcity, then there was Saprolegnia infection hitting stocks just before the spawning period or it could simply be that they ran through that section once the river levels increased.

Piscivorous Bird Counts

6 piscivorous bird count surveys were completed during 2025, 3 during the spring period and 3 in the Autumn months, all data from these surveys has been submitted to the Clerk of the Board.

Fish in River/Policing Patrols

Through the summer months and into the Autumn period, low river flows prevailed along with high water temperatures from Mid-June through to late October.

Due to these conditions, the majority of the angling effort was concentrated at Newburgh estuary, it was another great year for catches on this section of the Ythan.

The month of June, Sea trout in the 2lb up to 4lb class of fish were being landed, sea trout stocks were still building up at the estuary once entering from the sea. The following month of July saw some very big sea trout caught, reports of sea trout up to 8lb. Grilse were also showing in the tidal pools. Some fortunate anglers were getting sport from sea bass that had come into the estuary waters to feed. The good catches continued at Newburgh into mid-August. Fish that were holding at Newburgh were now starting to move further upstream and into the main River. ADAA anglers were now landing Finnock and Sea trout at the Macher pool and salmon and sea trout were holding in the pools at Ellon.

The long dry period continued through September, and salmon and sea trout were now accumulating in pools from Ardlethan down to Ellon. Angling effort was low due to water scarcity at this time on the main stem of the river.

SAPROIEGNIA INFECTION

On the 11th of October, I received reports from anglers fishing the Ardlethan beat that they were seeing adult salmon with white patches on their flanks and head. The fishery staff investigated the reports and walked the beat; they saw multiple salmon and Sea trout with patches of fungus.

The clerk of the Ythan DSFB was alerted to the situation and Fishery staff monitored the outbreak as it developed. Marine Scotland Fish Health Inspectorate along with SEPA ecology team were also notified.

A walk over survey was carried out on the 15th of October from Schivas downstream to the Meadows to establish the extent of this outbreak. 16 salmon and sea trout were found dead along with 8 sea trout showing signs of an infection.

It was later confirmed from the SEPA ecology that the infection was Saprolegnia and linked to water scarcity throughout the year and very warm river conditions.

A further survey was carried out from Fyvie downstream; there was no visual sign of infected fish found.

On the 24th of the month the river finally got relief after the long dry spell, with an increase in river level.

Over the following days on the river, there was no sign of dead fish but the stronger fish that had been affected were still showing in the lower pools between Ardlethen and Schivas area. hopefully these remaining fish made a successful spawning.