

CONSERVATION OF SALMON – ASSESSMENT FOR THE 2020 SEASON

BACKGROUND

1. The Conservation of Salmon (Scotland) Regulations 2016 outlined for the first time a system whereby the killing of Atlantic salmon in inland waters is managed on an annual basis by categorising the conservation status of their stocks. The Scottish Government is now consulting on proposals for the 2020 fishing season.

2. The conservation status of stocks is assessed on a river by river basis, except for those areas where fishery catch cannot be assigned to individual rivers. In such cases rivers are combined to form assessment groups. The conservation status of each stock is defined by the probability of the stock meeting its conservation limit over a five-year period. Rather than a simple pass or fail, stocks are allocated to one of three grades, each with its own recommended management actions:

Category	Probability of Meeting Conservation Limit	Advice
1	At least 80%	Exploitation is sustainable therefore no additional management action is currently required. This recognises the effectiveness of existing non-statutory local management interventions.
2	60-80%	Management action is necessary to reduce exploitation: catch and release should be promoted strongly in the first instance. The need for mandatory catch and release will be reviewed annually.
3	Less than 60%	Exploitation is unsustainable therefore management actions required to reduce exploitation for 1 year i.e. mandatory catch and release (all methods).

CHANGES FROM THE 2019 ASSESSMENT

3. The assessment for the 2020 season has incorporated all of the developments and improvements to the assessment model made in previous years, including the changes to the calculation of egg targets which had a significant impact on river gradings in 2019. Ministers have, however, given a commitment to the Scottish Parliament’s Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee and to stakeholders that we would not make any further significant changes to the methodology for this year or for at least two further seasons.

4. It is important to emphasise that, while the methodology has not changed for the 2020 season, the assessment has been made using the most up to date data available from fish counters and catch returns from the 2018 fishing season. This ensures that the outcomes of the assessment are based on the best available information.

5. No new rivers have been added for the 2020 assessment.

OVERALL OUTCOMES

6. As noted above, the 2020 assessment takes account of the most recently available catch return statistics. Calculations are therefore based on the average of the returns submitted for the five years 2014, when catches were generally low, to 2018 when catch return figures were at their lowest ever level.

7. As a result, the assessed conservation status for a number of the 173 rivers and river groupings is down, while just two rivers will rise in status under the latest assessment: River Moidart (Grade 3 to 2) and Gruinard River (Grade 2 to 1).

8. In addition, it is proposed that two rivers (Leven (Dunbartonshire) and Ness), which are assessed at Grade 1, will be awarded Grade 2 status to reflect the lower grading of a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) in the catchment – Endrick Water and River Moriston, respectively.

9. The overall position, and the net effect of the various changes is summarised in the table below:

Category	2016 (Districts)	2017 (Rivers)	2018	2019	2020
1	11	47	28	48	36
2	15	48	21	30	34
3	82	73	122	95	103

PROPOSED REGULATIONS

10. The Conservation of Salmon (Scotland) Regulations 2016, as amended, set out the regime for the regulation of salmon fishing in Scotland. In general terms the regulations:

- prohibit the retention of salmon caught in coastal waters;
- permit the killing of salmon within inland waters where stocks are above a defined conservation limit - ie those rivers accorded category 1 or 2 status for the fishing season; and
- require mandatory catch and release of salmon in areas which are below their defined conservation limit following the assessment of salmon stocks – ie those rivers accorded category 3 status for the season.

11. For the 2020 season, the Scottish Government will bring forward amending regulations which will replace the current Schedule 2. This schedule details the specific inland waters which are subject to the prohibition on retaining salmon.

12. No other changes are currently proposed.

RIVER TWEED

13. Separate legislation and arrangements are in place for the management of salmon and freshwater fisheries in the River Tweed district. The Tweed Regulation (Salmon Conservation) (No. 2) Order 2016 (“the Tweed No. 2 Order”) came into force on 1 April 2017 and made provision to regulate the taking of salmon in the district. In effect the Order:

- prohibited the retention of salmon caught in coastal waters in the Tweed district; and
- allowed the retention of salmon caught in the Tweed and all inland waters in the district as defined in article 2(1)(a) of the Order. This reflected the Category 1 conservation assessment of the river for the 2017 fishing season.

14. The outcome of the conservation assessment for the river for the 2020 season again accords the Tweed Category 1 status. In the light of this, the Scottish Government does not propose to amend the instrument as a result of the latest assessment. Accordingly, it is proposed that the Tweed No. 2 Order should remain in force. Separate discussions are currently being held to give effect to Ministers’ decision to amend the annual close time for salmon fishing on the River Tweed.

FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

15. The 2020 fishing season will be the fifth for which regulations will set the legislative framework for salmon fishing and the conservation of Atlantic salmon. While the structure of the adult model has been frozen for the latest assessment, the Scottish Government continues to explore further potential developments which could, in the future, help to refine and improve the annual salmon assessment. Work currently in hand includes:

Juvenile assessment tool - In 2018 the Scottish Government initiated the first ever national electrofishing programme for Scotland (NEPS). The project aims to provide a harmonised estimate of the numbers of young salmon across Scottish rivers, and data will be compared with the background model as part of the development of a juvenile assessment tool. Juvenile salmon from more than 800 sites across Scotland’s rivers were surveyed as part of the project. More information about the programme, including a report on the first year’s outcomes, can be found at <https://www2.gov.scot/Topics/marine/Salmon-Trout-Coarse/Freshwater/Monitoring/ElectrofishingProgramme>.

Collecting rod effort information - from the 2019 season we are asking anglers, proprietors and owners of fisheries to complete a simple new return reporting rod effort as the total number of rod days fished for salmon in each month. Our aim is to use these data to increase the accuracy of estimates of the total number of fish returning to rivers and to help explain trends in rod catch data. A Marine Scotland Topic Sheet issued in December 2018 and can be found at <https://www2.gov.scot/Topics/marine/Publications/TopicSheets/tslist/ts103>.

CONSULTATION

16. The proposed river gradings for the 2020 salmon fishing season are set out in a separate, associated document available at <https://www2.gov.scot/Topics/marine/Salmon-Trout-Coarse/fishreform/licence/status/limits>.

17. The Scottish Government invites representations or objections to the proposed river gradings for the 2020 season, and on the proposed regulations. These should be submitted by 19 September 2019 to:

Email: salmonandrecreationalfisheries@gov.scot

or to:

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