



Agenda item 5.1  
For information

**Council**

**CNL(19)41**

*Annual Progress Update for the Calendar Year 2018*

*EU – UK (Scotland)*



## CNL(19)41

### *EU – UK (Scotland) Annual Progress Update for the Calendar Year 2018*

In 2019, EU-UK-Scotland did not provide an annual progress report for the year 2018. While this was a difficult decision to take, considering our strong commitment to NASCO objectives, it was decided that our limited resources needed to be focused on delivering tangible actions on several crucial aspects related to wild salmon conservation, and in particular the preparation of an ambitious Implementation Plan for the next cycle of reporting.

Mindful of the legitimate concerns raised by this decision, we would like to submit the following elements for consideration by the Parties. We are hopeful that these clarifications will answer some of the questions in relation to important aspects of our Annual Progress Report.

1. Describe any major new initiatives or achievements for salmon conservation and management that you wish to highlight.

Our draft NASCO Implementation Plan 2019 – 2024 (<https://www2.gov.scot/Topics/marine/Salmon-Trout-Coarse/fishreform/licence/status/nascoip>) identifies 12 high level groups of pressures which, depending on local circumstances, impact on the conservation status of Scotland's wild salmon populations. Our view is that action alone on any single one of them, such as the impacts from aquaculture, is not a panacea that will resolve all challenges. We must continually seek to take reasonable and proportionate action, informed by the latest science, to address all of them.

In addition to publishing our draft NASCO Implementation Plan 2019 – 2024, we regularly update and publish the current key activities to address them at <https://www2.gov.scot/Topics/marine/Salmon-Trout-Coarse/fishreform/licence/status/Pressures>

These two documents describe or refer to 21 actions. Amongst these, we would in particular highlight the following deliverables:

- the adjustment of egg targets, in relation to local geographic variations, within our adult assessment.
- our ground-breaking national electrofishing survey, involving electrofishing of 30 sites in each of 27 regions in Scotland, covering all of our assessed catchment areas. We will publish the outputs from year 1 later this summer and have just agreed to fund year 2 of the data collection, at a cost of £400k.
- we've made substantial progress on the development of an on-line mapping based pressures tool, which will enable us to illustrate the severity and status of each of the pressures across catchment areas, so that Scotland has both a national and local picture. Following the pilot completion by a group of six volunteer organisations in autumn 2018, we hope to roll out the final product later this year.
- we have just, last week, published a new Marine Scotland stocking policy: (<https://www2.gov.scot/Topics/marine/Licensing/fishintros/introduction/SalmonStockingPolicy>).

- we have procured expert bird stomach analysis services, from within an EMFF fund of £750k, for scientific bird kills across 4 rivers in Scotland from March 2019 to February 2020. Depending on the outputs of this research, we intend to use the majority of the remaining EMFF fund to enable field testing, over the 2020 and 2021 seasons, of new management options to reduce the predation impact, whilst continuing to protect bird populations.

- early research into the potential for nutrient enrichment to improve the size and therefore marine survival of smolts is in peer review, but indicates benefit from adding nutrients to upland streams to counteract reduced numbers of spawning salmon and simulate the presence of adult carcasses. Work to date indicates that this leads to faster growth of juveniles and earlier migration to sea. Further research will seek to confirm this and assess benefits or otherwise over the entire life cycle.

- we continue to remove or ease redundant barriers in rivers, utilising circa £5m annual funding.

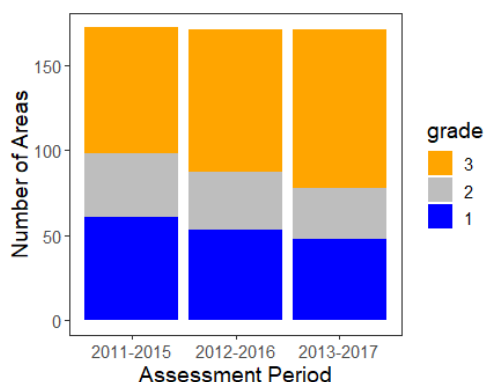
- we are part of the expert SeaSalar consortium examining factors impacting variation in marine survival of Atlantic salmon over time and in different geographical areas.

## 2. Stock status and catches.

Of the 173 stocks assessed for 2019 (171 for 2018), 49 (28%) were categorised as grade 1<sup>1</sup>; 30 (17%) as grade 2<sup>2</sup> and the remaining 94 (54%) as grade 3<sup>3</sup>. Corresponding proportions for 2018 were 16%, 12% and 71% respectively.

The overall structure and methodology for assessing the sustainability of salmon stocks has remained the same as in previous years. However, there are two changes between the 2018 and 2019 assessments which might be noted: the way in which the egg requirements for each river are calculated; and the estimate of numbers of returning adults.

However, by applying the new assessment methodology retrospectively to previous seasons we can demonstrate that, unfortunately, the overall trend is still heading downwards. This is illustrated in the graph below.



<sup>1</sup> Exploitation is sustainable therefore no additional management action is currently required. This recognises the effectiveness of existing non-statutory local management interventions.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> Exploitation is unsustainable therefore management actions required to reduce exploitation for 1 year i.e. mandatory catch and release (all methods).

*Number of assessment areas for the different grades when the latest conservation regulations assessment is run for three different time periods.*

We will now freeze the underlying methodology for two years, until the 2022 assessment, **within which period it will be fully and transparently peer-reviewed.**

More details are published at: <https://www2.gov.scot/Topics/marine/Salmon-Trout-Coarse/fishreform/licence/status>

The annual official statistics on reported catches of wild salmon and sea trout for the 2018 season were published on Wednesday 24 April 2019. **Total reported salmon and sea trout rod catches were the lowest since records began in 1952.**

Headline figures for reported catches in 2018 are:

- Total reported rod catch (retained and released) for 2018 is 37,196. This is the lowest on record and 67% of the previous 5-year average.
- **In 2018, 93% of total annual rod catch was released. This is 3% higher than the previous year and among the highest since figures were first recorded in 1994.** A total of 2,475 wild salmon and grilse was reported caught and retained in the rod and line fishery.
- Salmon reported as being of farmed origin represented just 0.1% of the total catch in 2018 – a total of 27 fish reported. This is significantly down on the figure for 2017, which was 1% of catches (605 fish).
- Reported catch and effort for the fixed engine and net & coble fisheries in 2018 remain among the lowest recorded by either fishery since records began in 1952.
- On the Solway, a total of **50** wild salmon and grilse was reported caught and retained in a scientific haaf net fishery in the Annan district. A further **69** salmon and grilse were reported caught and retained by other haaf nets in the Solway region. A total of **3,751** wild salmon and grilse was reported caught and retained in the net & coble fishery.

More detail is available at:

<https://www2.gov.scot/Topics/marine/Publications/stats/SalmonSeaTroutCatches/PublicationScheme>