



**Cyfoeth
Naturiol
Cymru
Natural
Resources
Wales**

RESPONSE FORM

Catch Controls: byelaws for Nets and Rods 2017

We would like to find out your views on the proposed byelaw changes to catch controls to help protect vulnerable salmon and sea trout stocks and fisheries. By providing this information we will be better able to understand the context to the answers that you provide to our consultation. We also want to quantify and be sure that we have received responses from all sectors that may be affected by, or have an interest in managing our fisheries. This information will therefore help us to accurately record who has responded to this consultation. Your details will only be kept for this consultation and any future work directly related to this.

Please note this is only a consultation on the proposed catch control byelaws. Any objections to the 2017 Net Limitation Order should be made separately to Welsh Government.

By Post to: Jeremy Frost, Marine and Fisheries Division, Inland Fisheries Strategy, CP2, North Core, 2Nd Floor Pillar, MO2, Cathays Park, Cardiff, CF10 3NQ . Or by email to jeremy.frost@Wales.gsi.gov.uk

Section 1

Q. 1a) About Yourself

Please tell us which one of the following categories best describes your primary interest in salmon and sea trout.

I am a licensed net fishermen

I am an angler.

I represent a group of individuals who fish for salmon and sea trout (please tell us the name of the group).

PONTARDAWE & SWANSEA ANGLING SOCIETY Ltd.

I own or lease salmon and sea trout fishing

I represent a salmon and sea trout conservation or environmental conservation organisation (please tell us the name of your organisation).

.....

I am involved in the catering industry and buy/sell wild salmon and sea trout (fish retailer, fishmonger, restaurateur, etc.)

I am involved in the tackle trade for angling

Response from Non-Governmental Organisation

Other (please specify).

If more than one of these categories applies to you please select all relevant categories.

Q. 1b) What part of the country do you have an interest in?

Please tell us where you primarily fish for salmon or where the salmon that support your business are from.

North Wales (Anglesey and North Gwynedd, Conwy, Denbighshire, Flintshire and Wrexham, Meirionnydd)

Mid Wales (Montgomeryshire, Ceredigion, Radnorshire)

South west Wales (Pembrokeshire, Carmarthenshire, Swansea, Neath Port Talbot and Bridgend)

South east Wales (Ely and Vale, Taff, Rhymney and Ebbw, Usk and Wye)

All Wales

Other e.g. England/Ireland/Scotland (please specify).....

If more than one of these categories applies to you please select all relevant categories.

Q. 1c) Please tell us how you found out about the Catch Controls consultation:

From Natural Resources Wales

From another organisation

Through an organisation you're a member of

Press article

Social media e.g. Facebook, Twitter

Through a meeting you attended

Other (please specify)

Name: PONTARDAWE & SWANSEA ANGLING SOCIETY Ltd.
C/O R.H.Lockyer

Address 8 BWLLFA ROAD
YNYSTAWE
SWANSEA
SA6 5AL

How we will use your information

Natural Resources Wales will look to make all responses publicly available after the consultation, unless you have specifically requested that we keep your response confidential.

We will not publish names of individuals who respond.

In accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000, we may be required to publish your response to this consultation, but will not include any personal information. If you have requested your response to be kept confidential, we may still be required to provide a summary of it.

We will not disclose financial or other individual specific information that could inadvertently identify an individual or his / her business.

We will also publish a summary of responses on our website in which we may publish the name of the organisation providing responses.

Returning your response

Your response to this consultation needs to be returned by **14th November**. Please respond using this form. You can add extra documents supporting any responses that you make but please make it very clear which question this additional information relates to.

Please ensure any evidence previously submitted as part of the Questionnaire in 2016 is re-submitted to make sure it is included in your submission.

We would like you to use this form if you are not submitting your response online. You can return it by email to Fisheries.Wales@cyfoethnaturiolcymru.gov.uk. Please use this email address if you have any questions regarding this consultation.

Or by post to: **David Mee, "Salmon and Sea Trout Byelaws", Natural Resources Wales, Maes Newydd, Llandarcy, Neath Port Talbot, SA10 6JQ**

We welcome your views on the catch control byelaws 2017.

Section 2

Q2a. Do you agree with Natural Resources Wales salmon and sea trout stock assessments?

Please tick the relevant box

- Yes**
 No
 Don't know

Please explain your answer.

The Society does not dispute that salmon and sea trout stocks are in decline; however, there is no evidence that anglers are the cause of the decline and all the available evidence indicates that the imposition of 100% catch and release will not correct the downward trend.

To halt/reverse the decline, causal issues need to be identified and addressed.

Q2b Please tell us if have any evidence to support a different stock assessment conclusion.

Section 3

Q3a. Do you support the proposed Net fishing byelaws?

Please tick the relevant box

- Yes**
 No
 Don't know

If no, please state on what grounds your objection is based.

In 2016 NRW issued 53 net licences across Wales taking:

- 241 salmon with a total weight of 904Kg
- and 1384 sea trout with a total weight of 2577Kg
- i.e total weight of salmon + sea trout = 3481 Kg

In recent times I've seen wild sea trout (tagged) on a Mumbles fishmongers slab at around £30 per kg; whilst similar details for salmon are not available, a 'guestimate' for the total retail value of the 3481Kg of salmon & sea trout is probably of the order £100k - £150k on that same fishmongers slab. This would give an average value of fish caught per licence sold that is in the region of £2000 - £3000. Clearly, the licence holder is not receiving that amount from the dealers and their endorsee's will need to be 'paid'.

Even if this estimate is out by a factor of 2 or even 3, it is obvious that netting of salmon & sea trout no longer provides a livelihood to the licence holders and, it is reasonable to conclude, they are now simply exploited stocks of salmon & sea trout as a hobby and deriving monetary gain from doing so. Very rightly, anglers are no longer permitted to sell fish; but in allowing net operators to make money from their hobby just smacks of discrimination against the angler.

Recent tagging schemes have been introduced for what are considered heritage net fisheries; it appears that anglers are being snubbed as they also have a heritage of being able to retain an occasional rod caught salmon for their table. If NRW are intent on increasing the percentage of rod caught salmon being released, then consideration should be given to the introduction of a national rod bag limit via a similar, licence identifiable, tagging scheme. Without such a scheme, anglers are again being discriminated against.

The practice of catch-and-release of salmon by netting operators appears to make little sense and we would like to see some evidence of survival rates for salmon by catch.

Q3b Do you support the proposed rod fishing byelaws?

Please tick the relevant box

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

If no, please state on what grounds your objection is based.

Please see supporting document attached below.

Section 4

Q4a. Please tell us if you have any further comments that haven't been covered by the previous questions.

Please see supporting document attached below.

Thank you for taking the time to fill in this consultation.

You can return it by email to Fisheries.Wales@cyfoethnaturiolcymru.gov.uk.

Or by post to: David Mee, "Salmon and Sea Trout Byelaws", Natural Resources Wales, Maes Newydd, Llandarcy, Neath Port Talbot, SA10 6JQ



Pontardawe and Swansea Angling Society Ltd

www.pasas.org.uk

Director, Life President and Secretary.

Ray Lockyer, 8 Bwllfa Rd Ynystawe Swansea SA6 5AL

Natural Resources Wales (NRW) Consultation **New Fishing Controls to Protect Salmon and Sea Trout Stocks.**

I write on behalf of the Pontardawe and Swansea Angling Society Ltd. in response to the Natural Resources Wales (NRW) Consultation Document - "Technical case supporting a public consultation on proposals for new fishing controls to protect salmon and sea trout stocks in Wales". It is noted that this rod and line catch control statutory consultation began on 22 August 2017 and will run until 14th November 2017

The Society was formed in 1945 and is a not-for-profit members club incorporated as a company limited by guarantee and the following briefly describes us:

- Membership is approximately 230 members, of whom approximately 60 are full adult members; others have concessionary membership through age or disability.
- the Society is open to all the community with no restriction on the number of members, it also provides day ticket access for visiting anglers,
- from membership subscriptions, carefully saved over many decades, we have purchase various parcels of land adjacent to the river, river bed and also fishing rights; generally these are on non-contiguous stretches of the River Tawe in the lower half of the Swansea Valley. We also rent or lease the fishing rights on several others sections of the Tawe from the riparian owners,
- the rights are on about a third of the lower river (about 8 miles); other similar clubs have the rights on stretches of the upper river.
- The Society also owns a section of fishing rights on a major tributary of the River Usk near Sennybridge.

With regard to the byelaws proposed by NRW to ensure that angling methods used are commensurate with the highest rate of survival after release, the only comment we would make is that the proposal for the prohibition on treble hooks may impose a substantial financial penalty for stockists of lures using this type of hook.

However, we wish to offer the following detailed response to the consultation proposal to introduce statutory catch-and-release to reduce exploitation of salmon.

1. Review of the Decline 2006 - 2016

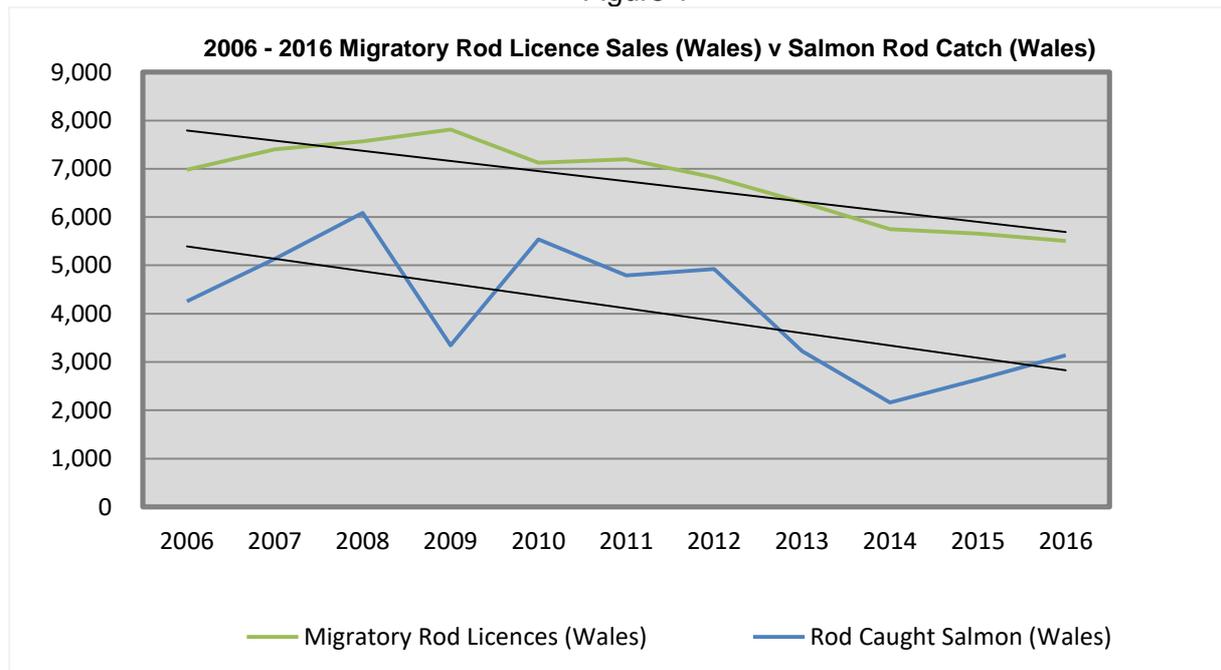
Salmon and sea trout catch statistics for the rivers of England and Wales have been published for the past 40 years in annual reports produced by a number of UK government agencies that were responsible for fisheries during the period. These statistics are currently jointly published by the Environment Agency (EA) and Natural Resources Wales; each of these latest annual reports (Salmonid and Freshwater Fisheries Statistics for England and Wales) include, amongst other fisheries data, the details of all rod caught salmon taken from a list of 62 rivers across Wales.

Early in the executive summary of the proposals published by NRW it states: "This follows our review of evidence of stock status *derived from catch statistics*, and the emerging concerns of the status of juvenile fish populations across Wales." These same catch statistics have been used to produce the plots shown in Figure 1 which exhibit a decline in both the annual number of rod caught salmon from these 62 listed rivers and also in the sales of migratory licences across Wales over the period from 2006 to 2016. Carrying out a similar exercise for rod caught

salmon from the 23 principle salmon rivers of Wales will demonstrate a very similar result. It is also worth recording that, in the 10 year period under review, the peak number of annual Welsh rod caught salmon occurred in 2008 when 6,085 fish were caught, the lowest number was 2,042 in 2014; similarly the migratory rod licence sales peaked at 7,815 in 2009 and have declined over the period to its lowest level of 5,507 in 2016.

Figure 1 illustrates that as the rod catch has fallen, the uptake of migratory rod licences has generally mirrored it, mostly with a one year delayed displacement in the sales; also the linear trend lines of the two plots demonstrate very similar rates of decline. Falling licence sales have meant fewer people fishing and as can be expected there's been a corresponding reduction in the number of fish caught. So it appears that licence sales and fish caught are inextricably linked, with less fish caught in a season resulting in reduced licence sales and vice versa.

Figure 1



In analysing the rod catch statistics NRW have stated:

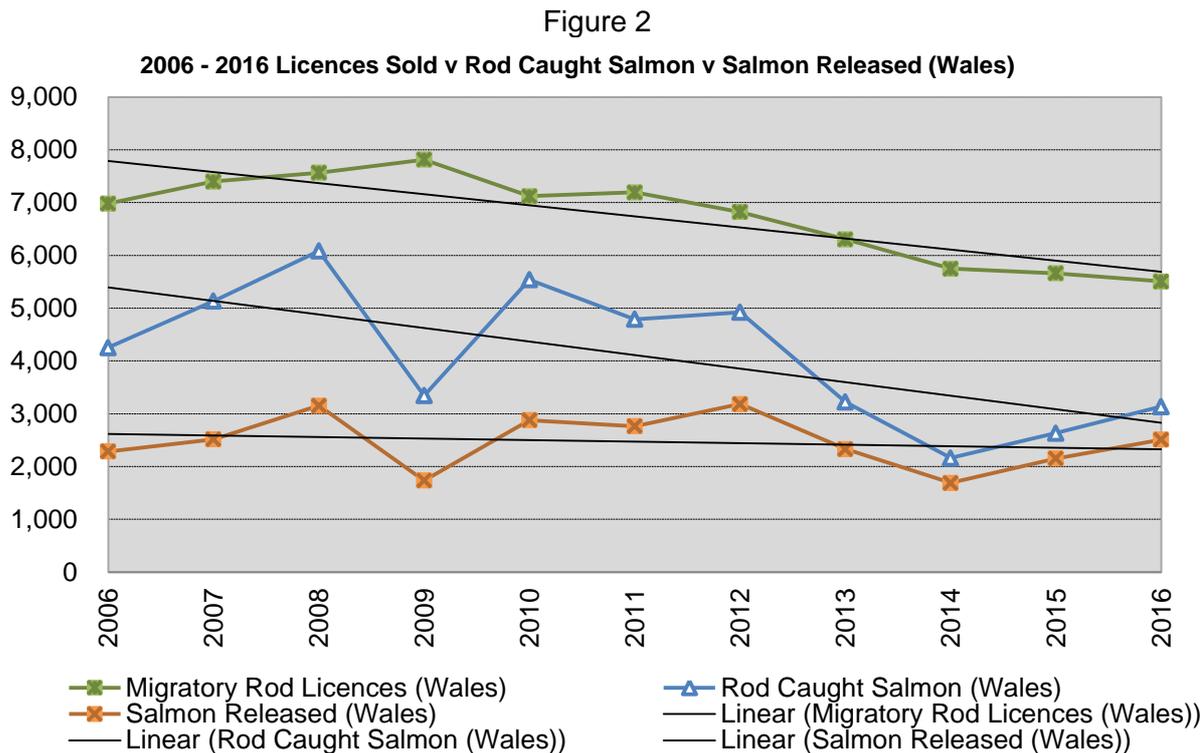
- *The most recent assessment of our stocks indicates that compliance with conservation limits and management targets across the whole of Wales is very poor.*
- *20 of our 23 principal salmon rivers are either 'At Risk' or 'Probably at Risk' of failing to achieve their management objectives in 5 years' time. All but 2 of these are continuing to decline.*
- *The only exceptions to this are the rivers Wye, Usk and Severn but only the Wye has a near statistically significant trend of improvement."*

Whilst not disputing the NRW assessment of stocks, it is worth noting that declining licence sales and numbers of anglers fishing will have adversely impacted the numbers of fish caught and hence the angler returns and the very fisheries statistics upon which part of the NRW 'Risk' assessments and these consultation proposals are based. As evidence of stock status is claimed by NRW to have been *derived from catch statistics* it raises the question as to whether the knock on effects of falling angler numbers has been factored into the NRW conclusions regarding the 'risk' status of a river i.e. whether it is 'At Risk' or 'Probably at Risk'.

2. Review of Catch-and-Release 2006 to 2016:

As indicated above, with the fall in licence sales there has been a reduction in rod caught salmon and, with decreasing numbers being caught, there have been less fish released. The three plots of Figure 2 serve to illustrate this, with the numbers of: licences sold, salmon caught and salmon released; each plot displaying a declining linear trend over the period. It is worth

noting that numbers of released salmon reached a peak in 2010 at 2,880 fish, with the minimum number of 1691 being recorded in 2014.



Despite this decline in numbers of salmon being released by anglers, because of the fall in numbers being caught, those fish that were released became a larger percentage of the total caught. The comparison of percentage released against the number of rod caught salmon across Wales is shown in Figure 3; here the linear trends illustrate that there has been a steady increase in the percentage of the rod catch being released; the minimum of 49% was in 2006 and this reached a peak of 86% in 2015.

The CEFAS, Salmon Stocks & Fisheries In England & Wales 2015 (Preliminary assessment prepared for ICES March 2016) reported that the provisional number of salmon released across England & Wales was 9925 and estimated that it contributed an additional 20million eggs to the breeding population i.e. approximately 2000 eggs per salmon released (it is assumed that this figure takes into account the ratio of male to female fish etc.)

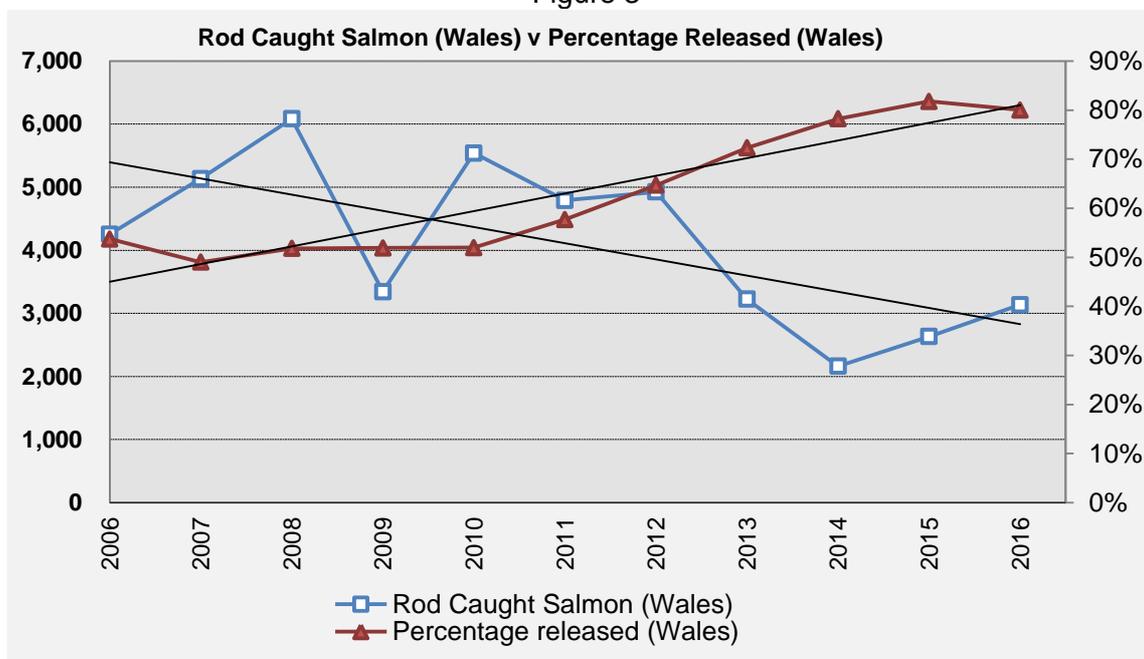
And an Atlantic Salmon Trust (AST) publication 'Atlantic Salmon Facts (revised 2003 and reprinted in 2005)' suggests that the mean survival rates of Atlantic Salmon eggs to the smolt stage is just 1% and similarly the figure for smolt to adults returning to coastal waters as grilse or 2 SW fish is 10% mean survival rate; giving a full life cycle survival rate of just 0.1% or less. Some more recent opinion suggests that egg to smolt survival rates may be even lower at 0.5% or even down to 0.3%, giving egg to returning adult rates that may now be 0.05% or even as low as 0.03%

The statistics for 2016 record 3137 rod caught salmon with 82% of these being released; therefore, a policy of mandatory 100% catch & release for rod caught salmon across Wales in 2016 would have potentially resulted in an additional 18% or 565 (or 282 pairs) of adult salmon being released; mainly across the 23 principal salmon rivers referred to in the consultation document i.e. on average $565/23 = 25$ (or 12.5 pairs) of adult salmon per principal salmon river. Based on the CEFAS and Atlantic Salmon Trust view on stock recruitment derived from released salmon this would produce $25 \times 2,000 = 50,000$ eggs which at 0.05% survival rate would produce just 25 returning adults per principle river i.e. each fish released would simply produce just 1 returning adult.

However, if survival rate is 0.03%, then 25 release fish per principle salmon river would only produce 15 (or 7.5 pairs) of returning adults i.e. each salmon released resulting in just 0.6 of a returning adult.

In our opinion, both of these survival rates imply that any additional numbers of salmon released would have contributed little more to a recovery than is currently being achieved with existing voluntary arrangements. In support of this view, Figure 3 indicates that despite the improving trend in the percentage of salmon being released from 49% to 86% over the past 10 years, it has done little to halt the ongoing decline in the trend line for rod caught salmon.

Figure 3



3. Comments Specific to the River Tawe

The industrial history of Swansea Valley is one of metal refining and coal mining that steadily increased throughout the late 19th and early 20 centuries; with this industrial development came a steady decline in the salmon and sea trout fisheries of the River Tawe. In 1861 a report published by ‘Commissioners Appointed to Inquire into the Salmon Fisheries (England & Wales)’ contained evidence for the Tawe that was collected on Monday 24th September 1860 at Swansea where one of the witnesses, a Matthew Moggridge Esq of the Willows, Cambrian Place, Swansea, who gave the following testimony:

“From universal repute, and testament of old fishermen, I know that the Tawe abounded in salmon, sewin, and trout. In my earliest recollection, going back about a quarter of a century, there were considerably larger numbers of salmon, and sewin more especially, than there have been of late years. The trout have also decreased materially, but the salmon and sewin are almost gone.”

When asked to what he attributed the decrease, he replied:

“To the emission of noxious waters, particularly from some works above Morryston, into the river; and to the weirs, which are totally impracticable for the passage of sea-going fish;

As the local industries developed, the demand for process water resulted in increased abstraction from a number of weirs in the River Tawe constructed for that purpose; these weirs created obstructions to returning salmon; there was also an unabated increase in pollution from the discharged effluent and eventually salmon and sea trout were completely eradicated from the river.

In 1935 Alderman Edward Harris, in his book entitled 'Swansea', describes the ancient fisheries in the Tawe: "In present days, the discoloured and polluted waters of the Tawe make it almost beyond belief that fish could ever have lived in it, much less that it was ever a fisherman's paradise, as reputed". In this pre-World War II period the River Tawe had no Fishery Board nor flood or pollution controls. However, with the end of the war came a steady decline in the heavy industry throughout the valley and a gradual improvement in water quality followed; in 1955 the first sea trout were reported.

The River Boards Act 1948 brought about the establishment of river boards throughout the whole of England and Wales and these boards had overall responsibility for land drainage, fisheries and river pollution. In 1951 the Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries and the Minister of Local Government & Planning issued a Direction to these river boards requiring them to publish annual reports; in 1959, the South West Wales River Board in its Eighth Report confirmed that during 1958:

"At the end of August, sewin were reported caught in the River Tawe at Morrision. The water bailiff saw 26 being caught, and it is estimated from reports that about 100 were caught from the river. A number of sets of scales were obtained for examination. The fish, which averaged 1lb. in weight appear to have been sewin whitling with two years fresh water life and a few months marine life, before moving back into fresh water. It seems improbable that many of these whitling spawned, and they probably moved back to the sea within a few months.

This is an event of some importance, as the River Tawe is heavily polluted, and passes through a heavy industrial belt; no migratory fish having been seen for over 50 years. It is possible that unusually heavy flows of fresh water, together with some abatement of pollution, having combined to bring sewin into the river."

This South West Wales River Board, Eight Report also recorded:

"migratory fish had, after a very long period, re-appeared in the River Tawe. Though the river is still highly polluted, much work is being done to combat this. A number of obstructions, however, exist in the river, as follows:

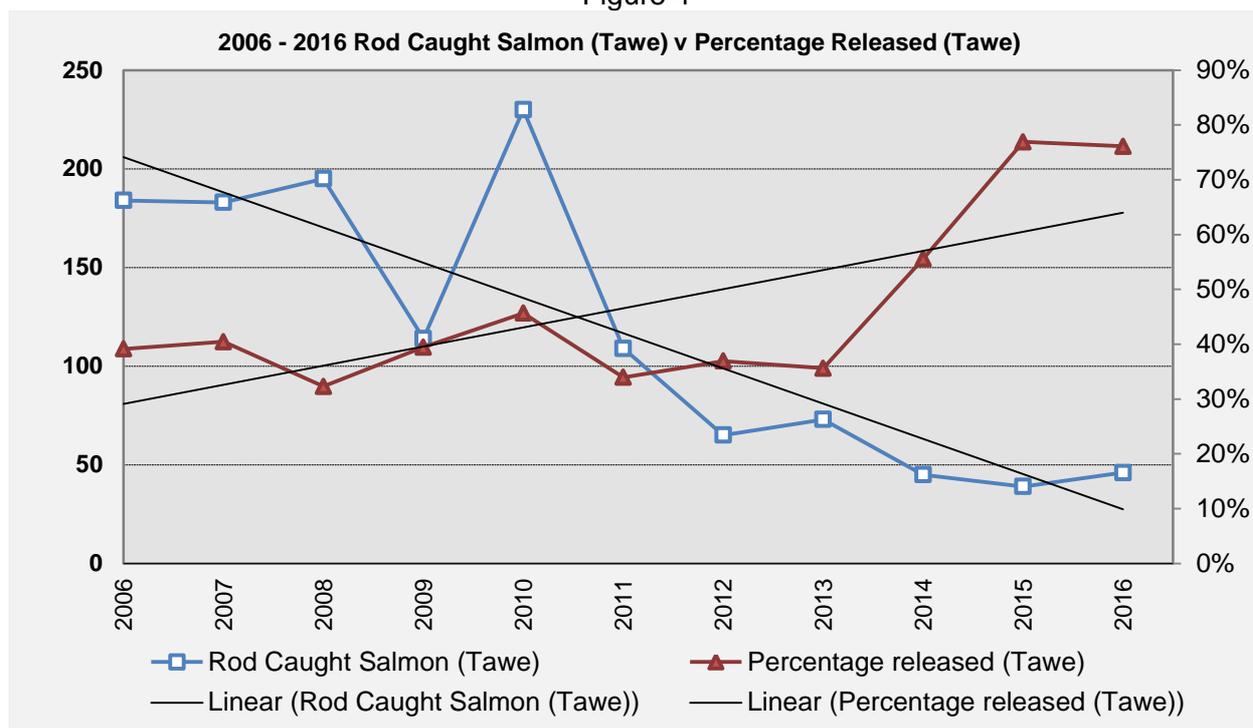
- (i) Weir below Morrision with 12 ft. inclined apron.
- (ii) Weir approximately 1 mile above Morrision with inclined apron, passable at high water.
- (iii) Weir at Panteg, Ystalyfera, with inclined apron, some 18 ft. high.
- (iv) Abercrave Weir, 12 to 15 ft. high.
- (v) Falls at Penrhos, above Abercrave, 10 to 12 ft. high.

The first recorded salmon, for probably more than a century, was caught in March 1961 i.e. soon after this documented report of sewin in the river. However, annual rod caught migratory salmonid statistics for the Tawe are only available from 1976 when just 5 salmon and 80 seatrout were recorded.

Sea trout rod catches had steadily increased through the 1980's, reaching a peak in 1987 of 1011, before being adversely impacted by the construction of the Swansea barrage in the early 1990's; since those times catch returns have declined. In 2011, there was a noticeable drop in the numbers of sea trout caught and the downward trend has continued; 2016 recording just 75, this being the lowest number of rod caught sea trout in the 40 years since the records began in 1976.

The construction of the Swansea Barrage had less of an impact on salmon stocks and plotting a linear trend from 1976 would show a steady increase through to 2010 when the annual number of River Tawe rod caught salmon peaked at an all-time, living memory, high of 230. However, the numbers of rod caught salmon collapsed in 2011 to 109 and have continued to decline, reaching a low of 39 in 2015. This decline occurred despite the percentage of Tawe rod caught salmon increasing substantially from just 39% in 2006 to a peak of 77% in 2015; this improvement is illustrated in Figure 4 and was achieved through the promotion, from all quarters, of voluntary catch-and-release.

Figure 4



The potential effect of 100% catch-and-release for Tawe salmon having been in place over the past two years would have been as follows:

- 2015 season the recorded rod catch was 39 salmon with 30 being released, assuming no mortality of those fish released, it would have added an extra 9 fish to the catchment breeding population i.e. with a 0.03% egg survival rate, 9 extra released adults would produce less than 5 returning adults.
- Similarly for the 2016 season the recorded rod catch was 46 salmon and 35 being released, assuming no mortality of the fish released, it would have added an extra 11 fish to the catchment breeding population i.e. with a 0.03% egg survival rate, 11 extra released adults, would produce just 5.5 returning adults.

Conclusions

The reader may have questioned the intent of the brief history of Tawe salmon stocks outline above; the purpose it serves is to highlight two conclusions that are relevant to the ongoing public consultation on proposals for new fishing controls to protect salmon and sea trout stocks in Wales:

- The River Tawe salmon recovered from being non-existent in the early 1950's to become a viable fishery by 2006 and the key to the improvements was the removal of those issues identified in 1860 by Matthew Moggridge as causing the damage.

Conclusion 1: When causal conditions improve, nature will recover a fishery that had become totally destroyed.

- During the early years of low but improving Tawe salmon stocks, little regard was paid by anglers to catch-and-release and what fish were caught went into the 'pot'; yet stock levels continued to steadily improve (until 2011).

Conclusion 2: The near non-existence of catch and release was not an impediment to improvement in salmon stocks.

Taking into account these two conclusions and having undertaken a detailed look at the numbers of rod caught salmon along with the catch and release statistics reported over the past ten years, we have further concluded that:

1. Angling is not the cause of declining salmon stocks across the rivers of Wales; this view is also supported by NRW themselves who have stated:
“there is no evidence that anglinghas been the cause of stock decline”
2. Anglers in Wales are already releasing up to 80+ percent of the salmon they catch and whilst we believe, for public relations reasons, they should be encouraged to continue doing so; however, evidence indicates it is having little effect in halting the decline.
3. For this reason, we do not support the introduction of 100% catch-and-release as the statistics suggest it will not provide the lasting, long term improvement in salmon stocks needed.
4. If the causal issues affecting the decline in salmon stocks are not identified and addressed it is clear that numbers will continue to fall; the ongoing linear trend is downward and it indicates that urgent action is required.
5. Whilst we understand the reasons for, and are sympathetic to the intentions of, NRW in wanting to protect the declining numbers of salmon returning to our rivers; we believe 100% catch-and-release will hinder the urgent action needed to identify causal issues and associated remedies to stimulate the salmon stock improvements that they and we desire.
6. Whilst there may be complex global issues in play such as the effects of climate change and mortalities at sea that require a multinational response; we believe there are many more readily identifiable issues that can be addressed and many will deliver an improved outcome compared to that of catch-and-release. So before the introduction of additional regulation, anglers would want to see action to address:
 - (i) unsustainable avian and mammalian predation;
 - (ii) widespread and endemic problems from sewage and agricultural pollution;
 - (iii) damage resulting from herbicides, abstraction and other habitat degradation;
 - (iv) a reduction in poaching;
 - (v) inshore and offshore netting, especially where salmonids are just a by-catch or where the prey species of salmon are targeted;
 - (vi) River Tawe specific, the inadequate and unapproved Swansea barrage fish pass (including its resident seal!).
7. In recent times there has been publicity given to tagging schemes introduced for what are considered heritage net fisheries operating for monetary gain; anglers also have a heritage where they retain an occasional rod caught salmon for their table. If NRW are intent on increasing the percentage of rod caught salmon being released, then consideration should be given to the introduction of a national rod bag limit via a, licence identifiable, tagging scheme.
8. NRW are the Welsh Government agency tasked to maintain & develop salmon and sea trout stocks in Welsh rivers and it appears to the Society that they are trying to do so without adequate funding and appropriate legislation. The responsibility for this task cannot be passed on to the angling community; catch-and-release or even closure of fisheries will not halt the decline, only tackling the causal issues will do so. The responsibility lies with the Welsh Government Minister who has the fisheries portfolio and that person should ensure NRW are given the resources to address the decline before salmon and sea trout stocks are destroyed.

Ray Lockyer
Director, Life President and Secretary

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