

SANA MIGRATORY FISH COMMITTEE

ANALYSIS OF SALMON AND SEA TROUT CATCHES TO DETERMINE THE TRUE IMPACT OF NETTING

Each year's official catch statistics are examined by the Committee, so that they and SANA's members at large may be better informed. For example, it is thought by some that because there are fewer netting stations in operation than hitherto, and that a three year moratorium had been declared on netting by fixed engines from 2016, they should not be a concern for fisheries policy.

Because of that ban on coastal nets in 2016, radical changes in the proportion of fish killed by nets could be expected. Indeed, that happened – but not to the extent that nets are an insignificant proportion of those that are retained. In the case of the North Esk, Scottish nets remain a significant pressure on stocks. Also, English nets are a huge threat to stocks in Scotland, especially sea trout. The numbers and the high average size indicate their killing of our broodstock on a grand scale.

Surprisingly, the release of the catch statistics demonstrates that some fixed engines were still operating in 2016. Partly, this arises because in the Solway region haaf nets are classified to this sector, capturing 33 salmon and 642 sea trout. However, that does not explain 170 sea trout being caught by this method in the Tweed District. It also prompts the question of how interceptory netting in the Tweed area managed to avoid catching salmon.

The headline figures for salmon and sea trout catches in official reports seem to indicate that recreational fishing is of overwhelmingly greater size than netting. However, the substantial point is that net fisheries, except those undertaken for research purposes, are almost entirely lethal – their objective is to produce dead fish for sale. Rod fishers are prevented, by law, from killing early spring fish and have complied with voluntary as well as compulsory catch and release under Scottish Government conservation measures. Selling rod caught salmon and sea trout is illegal. Some rod-caught fish are retained for personal use, while most are returned.

The key analysis is to look at the respective numbers of fish killed to provide food. That analysis showed that the net catch had become a more significant pressure on stocks in recent years, especially for fragile spring stocks of early running fish – which for anglers means from January to June. While still dominant, there was some easing in 2015. Because of the ban on coastal netting in 2016, there was considerable further easing. Nets accounted for 52% of early salmon killed in 2016. (Cf. 77% in 2014 and 66% in 2015.) Catches of coastal nets (fixed engines) predominated salmon netting – 86% of the early season net catch in 2015. These are liable to be mixed stock fisheries, a practice which is frowned on in international circles.

For sea trout, 41% of fish killed were retained by nets. 81% of anglers catches were released. The dominant net fishery was net and coble (66% in 2016). There are few such operations left in Scotland with the North Esk fishery dominant for sea trout in 2016, at it was with salmon. However, the Scottish figures pale to insignificance, relative to net catches of sea trout in the North East of England.

2015 statistics from the Environment Agency have been published only recently. Catches in 2015 (2014 in parentheses) were: Salmon and Grilse 15,863 (10,800); Sea Trout 60,696 (46,116). The sea trout average weight remained at 2 kilograms (4.4 lbs). The sea trout catch in these fisheries rose by 83% in 2013 and there was a further annual growth of 15% in 2014 (see footnote). This is a mixed stock fishery exploiting fish of unknown river origin, many of which are thought to be from river stocks in Scotland*. SANA prepared two submissions on this topic as part of a consultation on the future of this licensed fishery. It was announced that the number of licensed nets is to be reduced – and the remaining drift net licences will not be renewed after 2022. [The Scottish net fishery has a different legal basis and the right to fish in a particular place is private property. Drift-net fishing for salmon off the coast of Scotland was prohibited in 1962 and the ban remains in force.]

Craig Campbell,
4 May 2017

**footnote: The first analysis of genotyping of catch samples was completed in respect of salmon: Genetic Investigation of the North East English Net Fisheries by John Gilbey, Lee Stradmeyer, Eef Cauwelier, Stuart Middlemas Marine Scotland Science, Freshwater Laboratory, Faskally, Pitlochry, PH16 5LB. It says: "Assignment to region suggests that all NE English fisheries utilise a mixed stock resource, with between 40 – 80 % of the captures being fish of Scottish origin, depending on the fishery. Drift nets have the highest proportion of Scottish captures, and T and J nets the lowest."*

NUMBERS OF GAME FISH KILLED IN SCOTLAND - 2007 TO 2016

	Rod and Line	Nets	Total	Nets as % of total
Whole season salmon and grilse catch, retained in 2007	35,581 – after 61% release rate	19,897	55,478	36%
Whole season salmon and grilse catch, retained in 2008	32,821 – after 62% release rate	15,660	48,481	32%
Whole season salmon and grilse catch, retained in 2009	24,228 – after 71% release rate	12,855	37,083	35%
Whole season salmon and grilse catch, retained in 2010	32,712 – after 70% release rate	27,315	60,027	46%
Whole season salmon and grilse catch, retained in 2011	24,105 – after 73% release rate	19,818	43,923	45%
Whole season salmon and grilse catch, retained in 2012	22,682 – after 74% release rate	16,230	38,912	42%
Whole season salmon and grilse catch, retained in 2013	13,532 – after 80% release rate	24,370	37,902	64%
Whole season salmon and grilse catch, retained in 2014	8,036 – after 82% release rate	17,778	25,814	69%
Whole season salmon and grilse catch, retained in 2015	8,996 – after 84% release rate	13,583 - 76% caught by fixed engines	22,579	60%
Whole season salmon and grilse catch, retained in 2016	5,597 – after 90% release rate	2,846	8,443	34%

	Rod and Line	Nets	Total	Nets as % of total
Jan-June salmon and grilse catch, retained in 2007	4,503 - after 66% release rate	2,767	7,270	38%
Jan-June salmon and grilse catch, retained in 2008	5,708 - after 70% release rate	3,196	8,904	36%
Jan-June salmon and grilse catch, retained in 2009	3,512 - after 76% release rate	3,295	6,807	48%
Jan-June salmon and grilse catch, retained in 2010	2,808 – after 81% release rate	4,706	7514	63%
Jan-June salmon and grilse catch, retained in 2011	3,312 – after 84% release rate	7,153 – 76% taken in fixed engines	10,465	68%
Jan-June salmon and grilse catch, retained in 2012	3,024 – after 92% release rate	3,356 – 78% taken in fixed engines	6,380	53%
Jan-June salmon and grilse catch, retained in 2013	2,287 – after 87% release rate	4,457 – 85% taken in fixed engines	6,744	66%
Jan-June salmon and grilse catch, retained in 2014	1,265 – after 89% release rate	4,293 – 82% taken in fixed engines	5,558	77%
Jan-June salmon and grilse catch, retained in 2015	1,370 – after 91% release rate	2,706 – 86% taken in fixed engines	4,076	66%
Jan-June salmon and grilse catch, retained in 2016	1,084 – after 95% release rate	1,166 – of which 10 taken in fixed engines; 90% taken at N Esk	2,250	52%

	Rod and Line	Nets	Total	Nets as % of total
Post June Salmon and Grilse catch retained in 2007	31,078	17,130	48,208	36%
Post June Salmon and Grilse catch retained in 2008	27,113	12,464	39,577	31%
Post June Salmon and Grilse catch retained in 2009	20,716	9,560	30,276	32%
Post June Salmon and Grilse catch retained in 2010	29,904	22,609	52,513	43%
Post June Salmon and Grilse catch retained in 2011	20,793	12,665	33,458	38%
Post June Salmon and Grilse catch retained in 2012	19,658	12,874	32,532	40%
Post June Salmon and Grilse catch retained in 2013	11,245	19,913	31,158	64%
Post June Salmon and Grilse catch retained in 2014	6,771	13,485	20,256	67%
Post June Salmon and Grilse catch retained in 2015	7,626	10,877	18,503	59%
Post June Salmon and Grilse catch retained in 2016	4,513	1,680	6,193	27%

	Rod and Line	Nets	Total	Nets as % of total
Whole season sea trout catch, retained in 2007	10,383 - after 52% release rate	5,574	15,957	35%
Whole season sea trout catch, retained in 2008	7,612 - after 56% release rate	5,542	13,154	42%
Whole season sea trout catch, retained in 2009.	8,195 - after 66% release rate	9,378	17,573	53%
Whole season sea trout catch, retained in 2010	7,843 – after 72% release rate	11,023	18,866	58%
Whole season sea trout catch, retained in 2011	7,069 – after 70% release rate	5,648 – 69% taken by net and coble	12,717	44%
Whole season sea trout catch, retained in 2012	6,471 – after 71% release rate	5,115 – 52% taken by net and coble	11,586	44%
Whole season sea trout catch, retained in 2013	3,655 – after 77% release rate	6,116 - 56% taken by net and coble	9,771	63%
Whole season sea trout catch, retained in 2014	4,308 – after 80% release rate	6,108 - 61% taken by net and coble	10,416	59%
Whole season sea trout catch, retained in 2015	4,503– after 79% release rate	4,281 - 64% taken by net and coble	8,784	49%
Whole season sea trout catch, retained in 2016	3,499 – after 81% release rate	2,397 - 66% taken by net and coble; 53% of total taken at N Esk	5,896	41%

Source: MSS The data used in this table are Crown copyright, used with the permission of Marine Scotland Science. Marine Scotland is not responsible for interpretation of these data by third parties.

Additional to the text on page one above, the increased number of sea trout in the 2015 North East of England drift, T and J nets' catch was not a one-off experience. Their capture of salmon and grilse in 2014 was 10,800, down from 16,643 in 2013 but the sea trout catch was 46,116, up from a 2013 figure of 40,194. The average weight was reported at 2 kg, ie. 4.4 lb.

Source: Environment Agency website.