SANA MIGRATORY FISH COMMITTEE

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

The current small scale of net fisheries in Scotland, relative to historic levels, may have led some to believe that they no longer pose a significant risk to wild fish populations. The following table demonstrates otherwise.

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 selling salmon and sea trout. Therefore, their objectives are different. Some rod-caught fish are retained for personal use. Many are returned, as is shown by the data.

Therefore, to determine the relative impacts of the rod and net fisheries, the key analysis is to look at the respective numbers of fish killed to provide food.

That analysis shows that the net catch has 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. Nets accounted for 77% of salmon killed. Catches of coastal nets (fixed engines) predominate salmon netting – 82% of the early season net catch in 2014. These are liable to be mixed stock fisheries, a practice which is frowned on in international circles.

As in 2013, the catch statistics for 2014 from Marine Scotland Science show that no restraint was exercised by the net fishery during low water conditions in rivers. In the period from July onwards, nets accounted for 67% of salmon killed.

Note is also made of the very substantial catches in North East of England nets. Catches in 2014 were: Salmon and Grilse 10,800; Sea Trout 46,116. The sea trout catch in these fisheries rose by 83% in 2013 and a further annual growth of 15% in 2014. 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,
5 September 2015

*footnote: The first analysis of genotyping of catch samples has been 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 2014

	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%**
Jan-June salmon catch, retained in 2007	4,503 - after 66% release rate	2,767	7,270	38%
Jan-June salmon 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 – of which 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 – of which 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 – of which 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 – of which 82% taken in fixed engines**	**5,558**	**77%**
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%**
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 NB. Includes finnock. It is not clear how these were treated in previous years' statistics	8,195 - after 71% 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 69.7% release rate	5,648 – of which 69% taken by net and coble	12,717	44%

Whole season sea trout catch, retained in 2012	6,471 – after 70.7% release rate	5,115 – of which 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 of which 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 of which 61% taken by net and coble**	**10,416**	**59%**

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.

The 2014 North East of England drift, T and J nets' capture of salmon and grilse was 10,800, down from 16,643 in 2013. 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: Defra website.