

SALMON WATCH IRELAND NEWSLETTER

www.salmon.ie

Winter 2010

THE SALMON NEEDS YOU! JOIN SALMON WATCH IRELAND NOW

This newsletter is designed to bring you up to date on the wide range of issues currently impacting on the welfare of the Atlantic salmon in Ireland and on the role which Salmon Watch Ireland is playing in advancing the cause of salmon abundance.

This all costs money, not humungous amounts but enough to enable SWIRL take

legal advice, engage in advocacy at home and abroad, maintain a website and keep as many people as possible up to date with developments.

To date we have been able to feed off the surplus from the drift net campaign and a small number of benefactors but that is running out (for reasons that will be clear

from what follows) and steps must be taken to get our finances onto a more sustainable basis.

Inserted with this newsletter is an application to become a member of Salmon Watch Ireland and contribute financially to its work. Please join up today.

The Salmon Farm Shambles

Readers will be aware that SWIRL submitted a complaint to the European Commission in early 2009 that the Irish regime for the licensing and regulation of salmon farms was not in conformity with the requirements of the EU Habitats Directive. The SWIRL case was based on Article 6 of the Directive which is the same measure that effectively brought about the ending of drift netting. SWIRL has been actively cooperating with the Commission in the intervening period and has submitted extensive supplementary information to the original complaint (the original complaint and a supplementary submission can be found on www.salmon.ie). The complaint is being actively progressed by the Commission with the Irish authorities and has become part of a much wider review of how the government is managing Natura 2000 sites.

The truth of the matter is that the regulation of salmon farming in Ireland is a total shambles. Following a reorganisation in 2007 both the promotion and regulation of aquaculture is a function of the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food but, like their predecessors, they have totally failed to grapple with issues surrounding the siting of farms and the control of sea lice and other collateral damage to the environment. Most farms are effectively operating without proper licences since there is no process for renewing them (or for issuing new ones), there are very large arrears of licence fees and not one farm in the history of the industry in Ireland has ever been sanctioned for breach of its

licence. (See also 'North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organisation' below).

The following is the text of a briefing note which SWIRL has prepared for use with members of the Government and of the Oireachtas:

"The Irish regime for the licensing and regulation of fin fish (overwhelmingly salmon) farms is in chaos. If the situation is not addressed as a matter of urgency then:

- *the Government's plans for the development of the sector will not be realised.*
- *serious damage will continue to be inflicted on migrating wild juvenile salmonids (salmon and sea trout) and, as a result, on already hard pressed stocks of these fish.*

The main deficiencies in the current regime are that:

- the statutory framework is inadequate and, in particular, takes little account of the wider environmental issues associated with aquaculture;
- some of the key control measures (eg control of sea lice and benthic monitoring) are essentially voluntary; there is no enforcement of the regulations and protocols that do exist – a large number of licensees do not even pay their licence fees; there is no process in place for assessing applications for the renewal of licences.

Evidence of the damage that inappropriately sited and poorly managed salmon farms can inflict on wild stocks is incontrovertible. Scientific research in

Ireland and other NASCO nations and the observed effect on wild stocks of both the positioning and removal of farms overwhelmingly points towards the conclusion that salmon farms generate large concentrations of sea lice and that that these concentrations are hugely inimical to the survival of migrating juvenile salmon and sea trout.

The Cawley Report (on the development of Ireland's marine fisheries) acknowledged the sea lice problem but it received scant attention in either the BIM plan for the sector or in the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food 2009 green paper on the control of sea lice which was largely focused on the damage to the fish being farmed rather than on the impact on wild fish.

The conventional approach internationally (and in Ireland) to the control of sea lice on salmon farms has been to monitor levels of lice on the fish being farmed and to chemically treat the fish when trigger levels are reached. The system in Ireland is operated by the Marine Institute. It has become clear in Ireland and elsewhere, however, that while this system may be adequate to protect the farmed fish from heavy burdens of lice, it is totally inadequate as either an indicator of the impact on wild fish or a protector of wild fish. More advanced fish farm licensing regimes, such as in Norway are, therefore, moving to a system that confines fish farming to areas remote from salmonid bearing rivers".

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UK Salmon and Trout Association salmon farm campaign

The UK's Salmon and Trout Association has launched a broad based campaign against inappropriately located salmon farms in Scotland led by the lawyer, broadcaster and environmental campaigner Guy Linley-Adams. The campaign is aimed at relocating farms away from areas sensitive to wild fish and removing all smolt units away from river systems containing wild salmonids. The campaign is aimed at MPs, MEPs and MSPs, members of the UK and Scottish government, investors in fish farms, retailers and supermarkets, the media and consumers.

Salmon policy

SWIRL has launched a major project to develop a comprehensive statement on salmon conservation policy from the perspective of the 'private' sector. The first stage, involving the collation of up to date data on Irish salmon stocks and the factors impacting on them, will be completed before the end of the year. It is intended that at that stage there will be wide ranging consultation with all those with a stake in the future of Ireland's salmon stocks with a view to publishing the first edition of the statement in late 2011. All SWIRL members will be invited to contribute to the consultation process.

Illegal fishing

While very little hard data is available it is difficult to ignore the anecdotal evidence from all over Ireland that there has been quite significant illegal fishing for salmon in 2010 both at sea and inland. In the South West in particular it would appear that there have been a number of considerable confiscations of nets off the coast by Inland Fisheries Ireland ('IFI') officers. It is incumbent on all with a concern for salmon conservation to relay information about illegal fishing to the local office of IFI – including illegal fishing by anglers. If you have information on particular serious events please relay it to one of the SWIRL board members (see our website for contact details).

Castlemaine Harbour Fishery

In 2007 the then South Western Regional Fisheries Board ('SWRFB') allowed a mixed stock draft netting regime in Castlemaine Harbour despite the scientific advice that three of the rivers flowing into that area were below their Conservation Limit.

SWIRL and the Kerry Angling Federation ('KAF') successfully applied to the High Court for an injunction to prevent the commencement of the fishery.

In 2008 SWRFB again licenced a mixed stock fishery in Castlemaine Harbour. This time the Department of the Marine issued a bylaw specifically to prevent commercial fishing in this area; the bylaw was successfully challenged in the High Court on the basis that

insufficient time had been given to consider the bylaw; the Dept then issued a new bylaw which was successful in stopping the netting.

In a hearing of the substantive issue in the High Court on 11 and 12 March 2009 Mr Justice Hedigan ruled that the case was moot in the light of the new bylaw but stated his view that SWIRL and the KAF had been compelled to bring judicial review proceedings against the South Western Regional Fisheries Board. The Learned Judge awarded costs to SWIRL and KAF up to 1st August 2008 when Bye-Law 844/2008 came into effect.

The costs of this action came to approx €25,000 which was shared between KAF and SWIRL.

Cormorants

Following an initiative by SWIRL, a meeting of the various statutory bodies, SWIRL and Birdwatch Ireland agreed the proposition that cormorants were a predatory problem. As a result the National Parks and Wild Life Service has, during 2010, conducted a survey to quantify the predatory activity of cormorants. The EU Commission has made it clear that the management of cormorant populations is, within the terms of the Birds Directive, a matter for management by national governments.

2009 salmon catches

The old Central and Regional Fisheries Boards issued their report on the salmon and sea trout catches for 2009 in March 2010. During 2009 24,278 salmon were taken by all methods – a drop of 22% on the previous year. Of the total, 6,757 were taken by commercial interests. This was 22% down on 2008 and only 37% of the quota allocated to the sector. Anglers killed 17,521 salmon and caught and released a further 11,422 for a total of 28,943. The angling catch was 31% of the allocated quota and 72% of all salmon harvested. Full and fascinating details can be found on www.fisheriesireland.ie/Salmon-Management/wild-salmon-and-sea-trout-statistics.html

Inland Fisheries Ireland

Inland Fisheries Ireland became operational on 1 July and totally replaced the Central and Regional Fisheries Boards with one central agency. The CEO of the new organisation is Dr Ciaran Byrne with Dr Greg Forde in charge of operations (including protection) and Dr Cathal Gallagher responsible for research. Their initial website can be found at www.fisheriesireland.com

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Scientific Fisheries

Castlemaine Harbour came back into focus in 2010 when Minister of State for Fisheries Mr Conor Linehan TD announced the commencement of a scientific research salmon fishery in the harbour. The SWIRL press release issued at the time stated, *inter alia*, that “if this truly is a scientific initiative confined to 2010, limited to 800 salmon and under the close control of the Marine Institute, the Central Fishery Board and the South Western Regional Fisheries Board then important information about this mixed stock fishery may be gained. If, however, and in response to local pressure, it is a disguised means of reintroducing mixed stock fishing for salmon in Castlemaine Harbour then it will be a breach not only of the Government policy to end such fishing adopted in 2006 but also of Ireland’s obligations under the EU Habitats Directive and to the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organisation”.

SWIRL closely monitored the operation of the scientific fishing and there is no doubt that, whatever the efforts of Inland Fisheries Ireland and the Marine Institute, it was used as a smokescreen by some nets men for the illegal taking of salmon for sale.

Also in 2010 Minister Conor Lenihan initiated a fishery for scientific purposes in *Waterford Harbour*; another mixed stock fishery with a large number of drift netters who in the main declined to accept the compensation package in 2007. The survey has two stated primary objectives:

1. To determine genetically the current extent of Irish river of origin salmon captured in Waterford estuary and to also determine the presence, if any, of salmon from other countries in the estuary.
2. To capture salmon this summer and autumn to determine river of origin by genetic analysis within the Barrow / Nore /Suir river complex and also to provide a qualitative assessment of salmon stock abundance on the river Barrow where no stock estimate is currently available. (Note: A stock quantitative abundance estimate is available for the Nore and Suir rivers based on rod catch).

Sampling of scales and fin clips took place on five separate occasions at five locations in Waterford estuary between mid July and mid October, with all salmon being released post survey. Officers of IFI supervised the operation and provided scientific support to the project, while commercial fishermen advised on fishing areas and provided the boats for the survey.

There has also been a continuation of salmon capture for research purposes during 2010 on the *Boyne*.

It is vitally important that the salmon community have access to the results of these surveys and SWIRL will follow up with IFI on this.

North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organisation ('NASCO')

SWIRL is an accredited Non Governmental Organisation ('NGO') to NASCO and attends their annual conference at significant financial cost. Being an intergovernmental body NASCO is somewhat ponderous and slow to make progress but it does provide a platform on which the NGO group can push, embarrass and hassle member countries in whatever fashion possible to try to improve conditions for Atlantic salmon. NASCO conferences also give SWIRL the opportunity to meet with a wide range of people involved in salmon science, policy and management across the entire North Atlantic area.

Changes in the operation of NASCO in recent years give much greater scope for participation by NGOs and a three year cycle of detailed reviews of each country's policies and plans. The first of these cycles will be completed in 2011 and includes detailed analysis and comment on management measures, habitat and introductions, transgenics and aquaculture.

The focus at the 2010 conference (in Quebec City) was primarily on aquaculture and its impact on salmonids (but also on other forms of introductions and transgenics). True to their form on all matters to do with aquaculture the Irish authorities (ie DAFF) failed to provide a report on the matter in time for consideration by the conference and it will be subject to review by a group (including NGO representatives) later this year. The Irish report can be found at www.nasco.int/far_aquaculture/Aquaculture%20FAR_Ireland.pdf

River Trusts

The river trust movement, well established in England, Wales and Scotland, is beginning to also take hold in Ireland. The Slaney, Nore, Suir and now Lower Blackwater rivers trusts have been formed together with the well established Ballinderry and the new Six Mile in Northern Ireland. River trusts involve the bringing together of local voluntary effort working with the statutory bodies to manage and improve the freshwater habitat guided by best practice. This movement follows a tried and proven path and allows the whole community to be a part of river management. Anyone interested in learning more about the spreading river trust movement should contact Vincent Duigan at 086-3340898 or Bob Wemyss at 087-2512562.

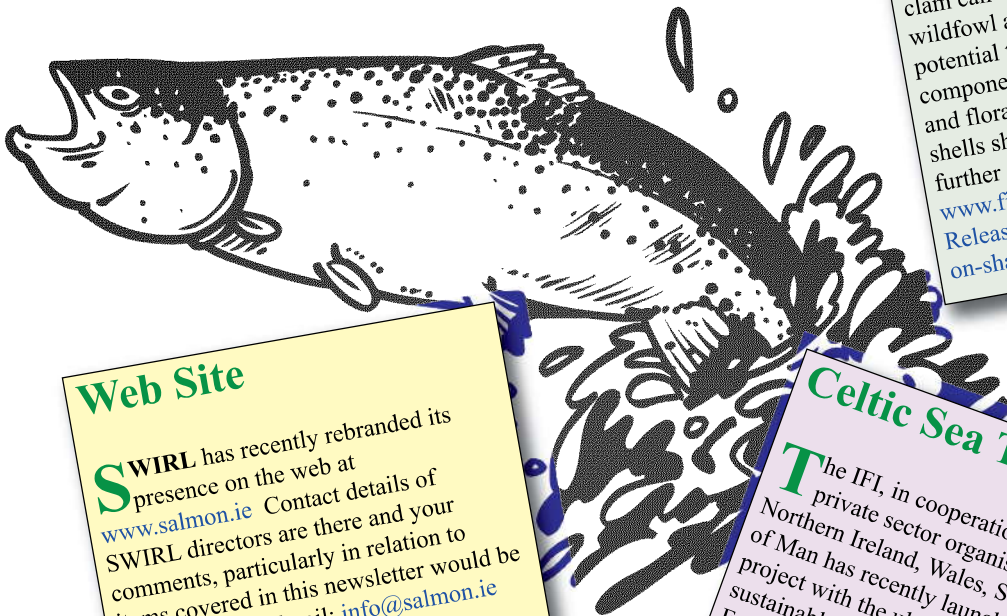
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Salmon at Sea Research Program ('SALSEA')

The SALSEA-Merge continues apace with ship borne research completed and the continuation of the analysis of the material collected. The program is designed to examine how Atlantic salmon interact with the ocean in terms of its journey, food source and potential predation. Hopefully some useful conclusions will emerge, particularly in relation to dwindling marine survival of salmon smolts. A full report on the project is to be given to a conference in La Rochelle in October 2011. Further information on SALSEA Merge can be found at www.nasco.int/sas/salseamerge.htm

Asian Clam extends its range in Irish rivers

The Asian clam, 'one of the world's most notorious freshwater invasive species' according to IFI, was first found in Ireland in April this year on the lower Barrow. It has now been found also at Carrick-on-Shannon. The clam can easily be spread by man, wildfowl and river currents and has the potential to effectively eliminate large components of our native aquatic fauna and flora. Any sighting of Asian clam shells should be reported to IFI. For further information see www.fisheriesireland/Press-Releases/asian-clam-reaches-carrick-on-shannon.html



Web Site

SWIRL has recently rebranded its presence on the web at www.salmon.ie. Contact details of SWIRL directors are there and your comments, particularly in relation to items covered in this newsletter would be very welcome. Email: info@salmon.ie

Celtic Sea Trout Project

The IFI, in cooperation with state and private sector organisations in Ireland, Northern Ireland, Wales, Scotland and the Isle of Man has recently launched a Euro 2 million project with the ultimate goal of ensuring sustainable sea trout fisheries in the Irish Sea. Further information can be found at www.fisheriesireland.ie/Press-Releases

Finance

SWIRL does not do salaries or perks or any such like. The board gives their time freely and pay their own travel costs to meetings. However we have substantial outlays. The legal costs associated with Castlemaine Harbour and the sea lice complaint to EU are high. As are annual costs to attend NASCO and the staging of seminars. We also need to commission reports from time to time to help progress a project.

We reckon it costs about €20,000 per year to finance SWIRL and we are looking for your support. Individually if you could donate up to €50 or, as an angling organisation, you could donate up to €100, then we can continue to be the voice for salmon conservation in Ireland. If you also wish to apply for membership of SWIRL, see the inserted form.

Cheques, Postal Orders please payable to Salmon Watch Ireland and sent to Vincent Duigan, 1 Bullock Park, Carlow, Ireland.

To:

Mr Bob Wemyss
Secretary
Salmon Watch Ireland Limited
Jerpoint Hill
Thomastown
Co. Kilkenny

Membership of Salmon Watch Ireland Limited

Dear Sir

I wish to accept the invitation of the Board of Directors of Salmon Watch Ireland Limited (“the Company”) to become a Member of the Company.

I confirm my consent to being bound by the Memorandum and Articles of Association of the Company and acknowledge that in the event of the winding up of the Company I may be required to contribute a sum not exceeding €10 (10 euro) to meeting the debts and liabilities of the Company.

Yours faithfully

SIGNATURE:.....

NAME IN BLOCK CAPITALS:.....

ADDRESS:.....

.....

EMAIL ADDRESS.....

DATE:.....

Annual Subscription €50 per member / €100 per club