

2026

ANNUAL REVIEW



Supporting the recovery of Scotland's rivers
and coastal waters for nature and people



Our Vision

Scotland will have resilient river catchments and coastal waters which support abundant populations of native wild salmon, sea trout, migratory and freshwater species, for the benefit of nature and people.

Our Mission

Our mission is to amplify our members' voice to influence government, relevant national policies, regulations and key stakeholders.

We will support our members through provision of training, guidance and financial resources and promote international best practice in the conservation and evidence-based management of native fish, river catchments and coastal waters.

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Chairman's Introduction

David Johnstone

Chairman, Fisheries
Management Scotland



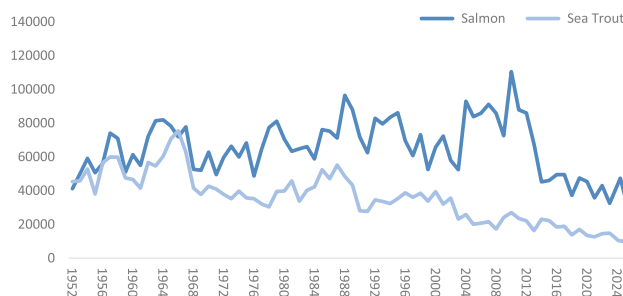
I am delighted to introduce this review as the new chair of Fisheries Management Scotland. I would like to thank my predecessor, Richard Sankey, who oversaw a growth in the capacity of the team, and I hope the benefits are clear to anyone reading this review.

I have now completed nearly one year as chair of FMS, and despite our rivers facing some real challenges, I am pleased to reflect on a year marked by meaningful progress and an enduring commitment to protecting Scotland's native wild fish and their habitats. Our members continue to deliver amazing work that improves habitats and strengthens the resilience of our rivers and lochs against future challenges.

Our national projects have supported essential activity and delivered considerable benefits for members. In the past year, we have secured £866K from the Scottish Government to equip our members with the latest enforcement and monitoring technology, deliver training, improve the capability of sonar fish counters, support ongoing data collection on adult salmon, resource fish barrier assessment work and support our Scottish Fisheries Coordination Centre. We are extremely grateful to Crown Estate Scotland, who continue to invest in supporting two key roles in our team. We submitted a successful bid to support monitoring of sea lice infestation pressure on wild sea trout in the aquaculture zone. The results will feed directly into the new regulatory framework. The Scottish Rivers Fund will open later in 2026, and I am delighted to report that NatureScot will host the fund.

On policy and advocacy, for such a small organisation we punch well above our weight and we continue to play a substantial leadership role in the delivery of Scotland's Wild Salmon Strategy. Aligned to this, we should celebrate securing increased penalties for fish poaching offences through the Natural Environment Bill – read more on page 7. As a small organisation, we recognise the vital need to work in collaboration with a wide range of partners, including the Missing Salmon Alliance and the Riverwoods Blueprint Project. Together, we can make a real difference.

Annual Salmon and Sea Trout Catches Scotland 1952-2025



Source - Marine Directorate © Crown copyright

This past year has also brought substantial challenges. Climate change continues to place pressure on freshwater ecosystems, with water scarcity being a dominant feature for many rivers in 2025. This is reflected in the provisional catches for 2025 shown above. We are extremely conscious of the financial pressure that many of our members are under. We have highlighted these financial challenges and developed a series of recommendations to address them through a specific workstream in the Wild Salmon Strategy. Delivering these recommendations will be a significant priority in the next Parliamentary session.

In my short time as chair, I have been struck by the strength of our national network. It's clear that FMS has built a strong reputation as a trusted and respected leader, and we are considered as a key partner in coordinating and delivering important strategic monitoring and projects. We could not have achieved this without the benefit of a strong and professional membership, and I would like to extend my sincere thanks to our members, funding and delivery partners, and to our dedicated staff team. Together, we are building firm foundations for a more resilient future for Scotland's river catchments and the native fish that rely on them.

Chief Executive's Introduction

Alan Wells

Chief Executive,
Fisheries Management Scotland



The past year has again highlighted the scale of the challenges facing Scotland's rivers and the species they contain. I am fortunate to lead a dedicated and highly professional team who are working hard to support our members to reverse the current trends.

Significant water scarcity was a key factor for east coast rivers throughout 2025. Prolonged periods of low flows exacerbate other issues – including predation, disease and warming waters – and we continue to argue for earlier and stronger action to ensure that suitable flows for nature are maintained in our rivers.

We had a major success in January 2026, when our proposed amendment to the Natural Environment Bill was passed unanimously (see page 7). The amendment significantly strengthens the available penalties for fish poaching offences and follows on from excellent work by the FMS enforcement committee, which developed the recommendations that led to the amendment. I would like to thank everyone who has helped to make this change happen – in particular, Emma Harper MSP for lodging and supporting this amendment and Mairi Gougeon, Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands, for working with Emma to bring the amendment forward.



Fisheries Management Scotland provided written and oral evidence to the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee as part of its ongoing inquiry into salmon farming in Scotland. This was another opportunity to highlight that insufficient progress has been made in addressing key risks to wild fish and to call for strengthened action to protect Scotland's wild Atlantic salmon. We continue to engage with Government, regulators and the farmed salmon sector to ensure that already vulnerable wild fish populations are not exposed to avoidable additional pressures, particularly in the light of ongoing regulatory appeals.

Read more:



In 2026, we launched our FMS Strategy to 2030. This is a public-facing document which clearly sets out our priorities for the next few years, and the partnerships we have and will forge to make this happen. This review is structured around the agreed goals identified in our strategy.

I would like to thank Sean Robertson, Chloe Grant and Leah Reinfranck who left Fisheries Management Scotland in 2025. Whilst they have now moved on to new challenges, their contribution and legacy can be seen throughout this review. Graeme Cullen, Julia McCarthy and Federica Foadelli have joined FMS and are already making a huge contribution to the team.

I want to pay tribute to the breadth and depth of work being undertaken by our members across Scotland to benefit our rivers, wild salmon and sea trout, and a range of other species. You can see many examples of this work in the pages of this review. Please get involved in any way possible to support this incredible work. As I stated last year, your involvement and support matters now more than ever.

Our Goals



Amplify our community's voice through strong advocacy and meaningful engagement



Deliver value to our members to support conservation, restoration, protection and management



Develop and maintain strong partnerships



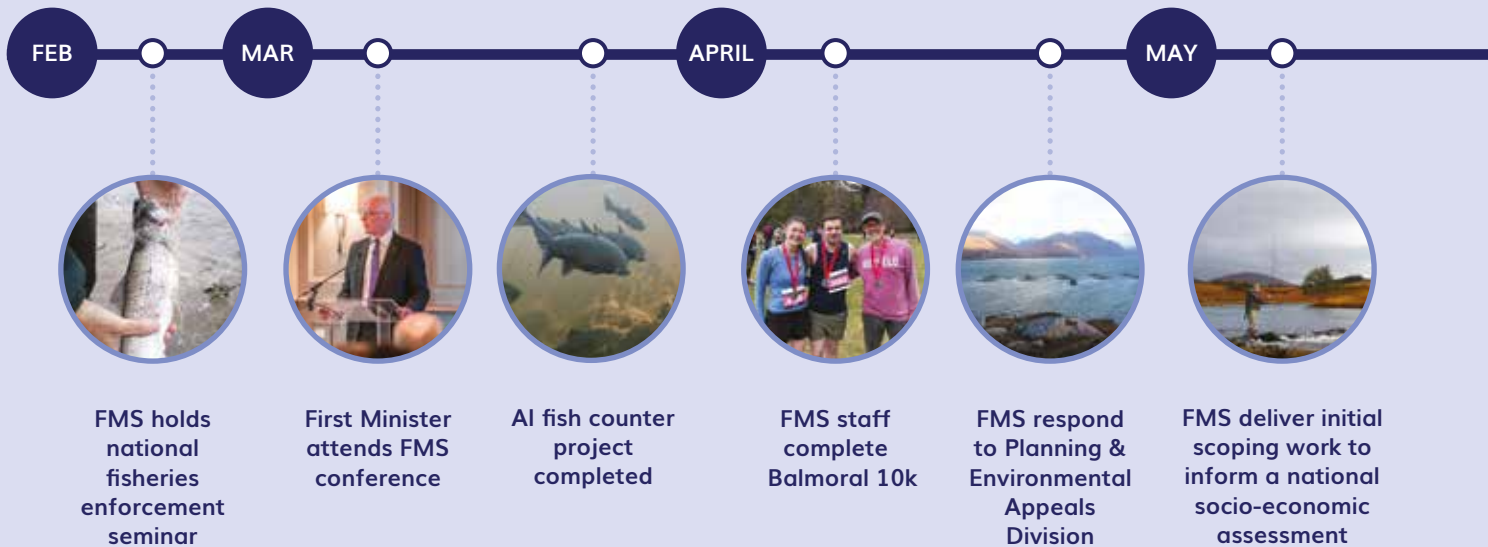
Build capacity and resilience within our membership



Build capacity and resilience in Fisheries Management Scotland

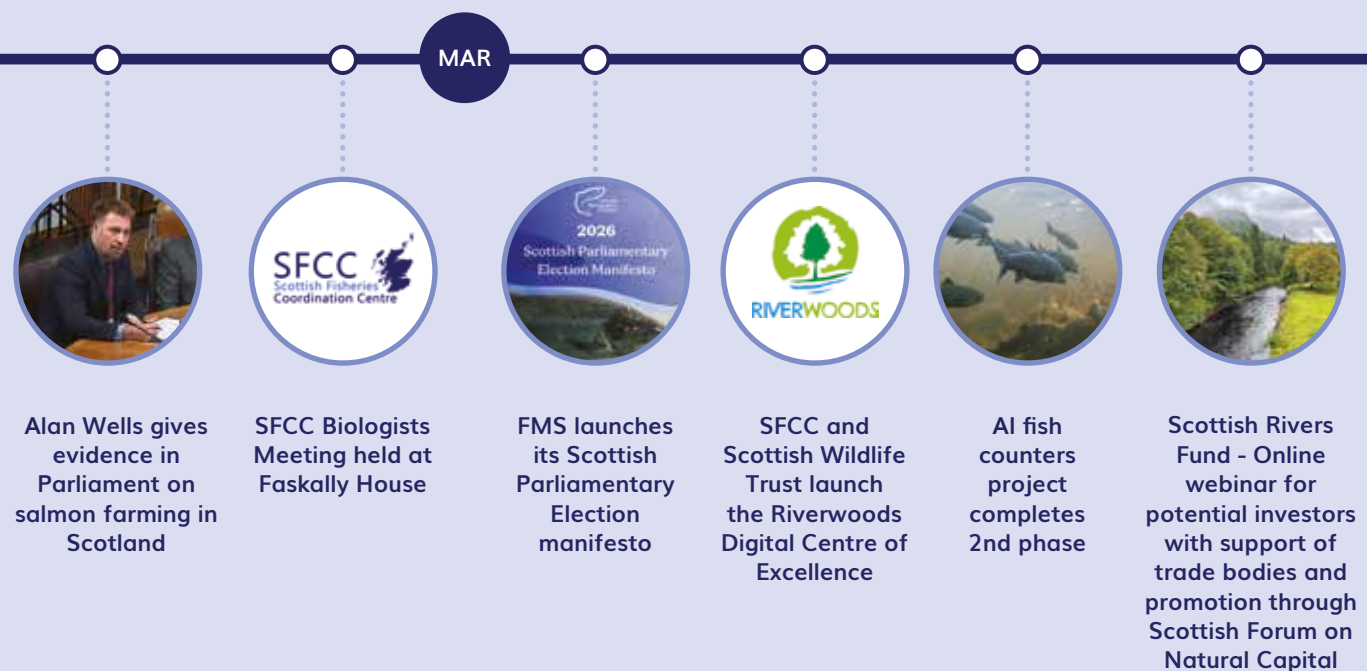
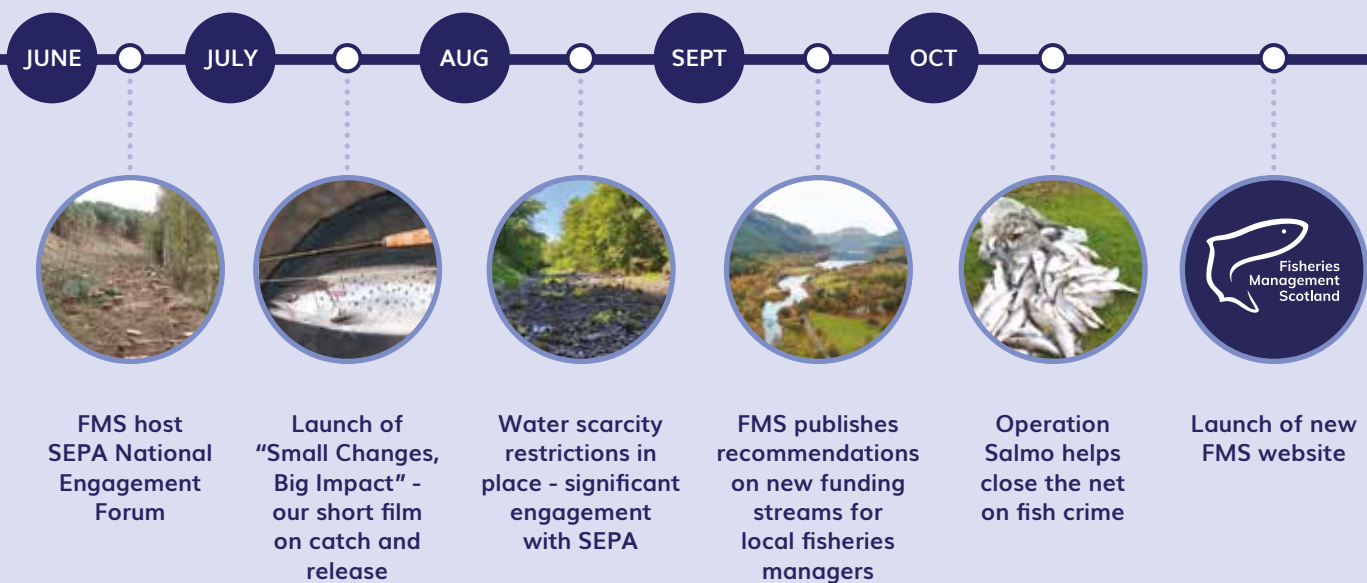
Our Year in Review

2025



2026







Amplify our community's voice
through strong advocacy and
meaningful engagement



Greater legal protection against poaching

Brian Davidson

Director of Operations,
Fisheries Management Scotland



The Natural Environment Scotland Bill was introduced to Holyrood in early 2025 with the aim of improving biodiversity and regenerating the natural environment. As it was a manifesto commitment, FMS was keen to use the Bill to make improvements to the legislation that governs wild fisheries management. This was a key piece of work undertaken by the FMS Enforcement Committee, and was an action on the Wild Salmon Strategy.

As introduced, the Bill had four main parts:

- Part 1 would require the Scottish Government to introduce targets to improve biodiversity.
- Part 2 would allow Scottish Government to make and change laws relating to the Environmental Impact Assessments regime and the Habitats Regulations.
- Part 3 would update the aims of National Parks and make changes to the way National Parks are run.
- Part 4 related to the management of wild deer.

Part 2 came under heavy criticism during the consultation and the first stage of the Parliamentary process, as stakeholders were concerned that it could be used to dilute important environmental safeguards. In an unusual turn of events an amendment was passed which removed it entirely.

We take a strong interest in the statutory targets for nature under Part 1. These will be introduced through secondary legislation and influencing these for the benefit of wild salmon will be an important priority in the next Parliamentary session.

Our key aim during the Parliamentary process was to work with officials, MSPs and Mairi Gougeon, Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands, to build support for an amendment to significantly increase the available penalties for the most serious fish poaching offences. We were delighted that Emma Harper MSP tabled the amendment, which was passed unanimously by the Scottish Parliament.

Once that part of the Bill becomes law, poachers will face fines of up to £40,000. And, for the first time, the law will allow for each individual poached fish to be counted as a separate offence. This is a significant milestone for the protection of an endangered species, and we believe that these changes send a strong message that Scotland cares deeply about wild salmon and sea trout. We hope that future fines act as a real deterrent against these significant wildlife crimes.



Scotland's Wild Salmon Strategy

Alan Wells

CEO, Fisheries Management Scotland



Scotland's Wild Salmon Strategy (WSS) and associated implementation plan represent key means by which we can make the case for concerted action to protect and restore wild salmon populations across the country.

Scotland's wild salmon face an incredibly diverse range of pressures in both domestic and international environments and action is required to address these pressures across multiple Government departments. The fact that we can point to a strategy that sets out Scottish Ministers' priorities for wild salmon has helped to facilitate engagement and action that previously would have been very hard to achieve.

I'm sure we can all think of examples of documents which are published to great fanfare, only to be consigned to a shelf to gather dust. As soon as the Scottish Wild Salmon Strategy was announced, we were determined to ensure that this was not the case. We have volunteered to help deliver some key aspects of the strategy and we continue to press for action on others. This article sets out some of the work that we have undertaken over the past year in support of the strategy's delivery.

Our National Engagement with SEPA is relevant to several actions set out in the WSS implementation plan. During 2025, we facilitated extensive discussions about water scarcity and raised concerns about SEPA's current approach to the situation experienced on the east coast in 2025. We have made recommendations for change through formal consultation processes. The FMS Hydro Committee is continuing to contribute to SEPA's review of large-scale hydro-electric generation schemes and we presented a paper to SEPA setting out key priorities for fish and fisheries. In recent months we were awarded grant funding from Scottish Government to enable FMS members to help deliver fish barrier assessments at a range of sites identified by SEPA (see page 16).

Predation of wild salmon continues to be a key issue for members of FMS. We engaged with the NatureScot licensing review and the review of the seal licensing system during 2025. We expect the conclusions of the NatureScot Licensing Review later in 2026. The WSS

Science and Evidence Board also considered the impact of predation by birds and seals and a short summary of the relevant evidence was published. FMS recently joined the Marine Mammal Scientific Support Steering Group, which oversees a research programme, including work on seal and salmon interactions. The Sea Mammal Research Unit is continuing to test a 'detect and deter' system, which shows real promise in preventing seals from entering rivers.

Through funding from the Marine Directorate's Marine Fund Scotland, we purchased and distributed disinfectant to prevent the introduction and spread of disease, and designed bespoke signage to increase public awareness of biosecurity.

Following the completion of a review of the offences in the Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries (Consolidation) (Scotland) Act 2003, we successfully amended the Natural Environment Bill to increase the available penalties for fish poaching offences (see page 7).

Having issued guidance on best practice catch and release last year, we launched a short film, *Catch and Release – Small Changes, Big Impact* this year to accompany the guidance.

We are continuing to work to deliver the recommendations of the Salmon Interactions Working Group, and in 2025 we contributed to a working group developing options for delivery of penalties for fish farm escapes.

Last year, FMS established a working group to examine new ways to support and resource local fisheries management and restoration actions. This work was completed in 2025 and a report was submitted to the Scottish Government – more detail can be found on page 27.

Scotland's Wild Salmon Strategy helps us to protect and restore wild salmon. The need for ongoing action has never been stronger, and as part of our engagement with political parties in the lead-up to the 2026 Election Manifesto, support for the Wild Salmon Strategy was a key ask. We will continue to make this case.



“We call on all political parties to commit to fully delivering Scotland’s Wild Salmon Strategy and provide renewed funding and political backing for a robust successor plan to secure the long-term future of wild Atlantic salmon.”

Closing the net on fish crime

Constable Gavin Ross

Scottish Investigative Support Officer, UK National Wildlife Crime Unit, seconded from Police Scotland



In the past poaching was perhaps often viewed as individuals merely taking “one for the pot” from wealthy lairds, but things have changed and tackling poaching is now a national wildlife crime priority – salmon numbers are struggling, so the effect of any fish taken not only impacts the health of the fishing industry but also the survival of this endangered species.

Organised poaching still takes place, as there remains a lucrative market for salmon. Illegal netting is the most common method used by poachers and it can not only catch large numbers of salmon but also birds and otters. Other methods employed include deliberate foul hooking (aka ripping, snagging, jaggging), gaffing, even poisoning of the river.

In 2025 Police Scotland, in conjunction with Fisheries Management Scotland and Scotland's network of bailiffs, ran Operation Salmo. Officers teamed up with bailiffs and conducted patrols at known poaching hotspots to catch or deter poachers and to raise awareness in communities of this ongoing criminality. Operation Salmo continues to get results. We saw

extensive social media coverage, intelligence gathered, new partnerships created, and eighteen joint patrols conducted, some of which succeeded in catching poachers in the act, as well as a number of nets traced, seized and destroyed.

It has brought together communities, fishers, bailiffs and police and they continue to work together protecting our wildlife.

Should you witness poaching, contact the police via 101 or 999 and provide as much information as possible regarding the location, description of suspects, and any vehicles nearby that could belong to the suspects. Primarily, keep your distance and keep safe. Do not confront the individuals.



It's high time to tackle low flows

Julia McCarthy

Wild Salmon
Conservation Manager



Last summer saw one of the longest periods of water scarcity on record in Scotland, with some catchments recording more than 100 days of extreme low flows. Despite a very wet winter, if spring and summer rainfall is low, there is still a risk of water scarcity in some areas.

Drought can pose serious challenges for our fish populations. Wild salmon and freshwater fish require cold, clean water to thrive and lack of water means that there is an increased risk of higher water temperatures and lower dissolved oxygen levels. Low water levels can also impede fish migration, particularly at man-made barriers, causing fish to congregate in greater numbers, which increases the risk of disease outbreaks, poaching and predation. And, with less water in our rivers and lochs, there is far less capability for dilution of pollution.

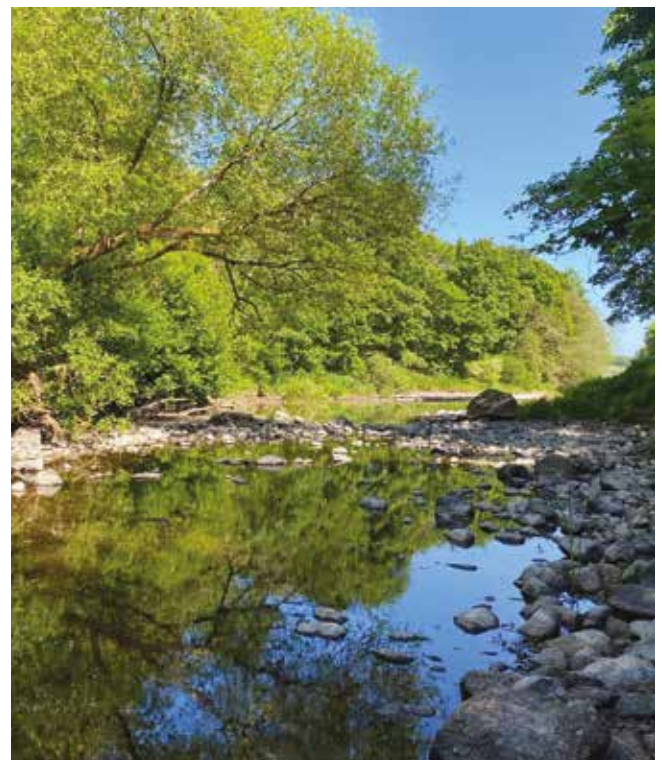
The Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) has been proactive in their water scarcity communications, working with organisations and other partners to provide advice on efficient water use and engaging early with abstractors as risks increase. In addition, SEPA has established a regular water scarcity communications group (of which FMS is a member).

While we are supportive of SEPA's proactive approach, we continue to have serious concerns about the underlying regulatory approach that defines significant water scarcity and triggers action, and we have been actively raising these concerns with SEPA over the last year. For example, some rivers are split into upper and lower catchments, which leads to different water management policies within the same river system and inconsistencies relating to when abstraction is suspended.

Of particular note, in 2025, the lower Spey was declared to be experiencing significant water scarcity, and abstraction was suspended, while water users in the upper catchment could continue to abstract, including diverting water to other river systems. This situation must change.

SEPA's trigger to take action over significant water scarcity requires 30 continuous days of extreme low flow (known as a Q95 flow). This means a river may experience prolonged periods of extreme low flow without triggering action, due to small and insignificant rain events. Relying on this definition can allow abstraction to continue through prolonged dry periods, exacerbating adverse effects on fish and other aquatic life. Instead, we believe the definition should rely on cumulative days of extreme low flows to better protect aquatic life from the compounded effect of drought and water abstraction. The Centre of Expertise for Waters is leading a study to evaluate the ecological responses to extreme low flow and results should help to inform any necessary updates to SEPA's regulatory approach. FMS members have been contacted for local data that could support this project.

SEPA's website provides up-to-date information on water scarcity, including the Winter Water Situation Report, and this will be supplemented by weekly water scarcity reports from May onwards (<https://beta.sepa.scot/water-scarcity/>).





Deliver value to our members to support conservation, restoration, protection and management



Understanding the risk of Saprolegniosis in Scottish rivers



Vasileios Kyparissis* & Pieter van West

*PhD candidate, University of Aberdeen

Moving into the third year of his PhD project, Vasileios continues to investigate the increasing impact of *Saprolegnia parasitica* on Scotland's wild Atlantic salmon. In recent years, several rivers have experienced unusually severe outbreaks of saprolegniosis (Fig.1), contributing to significant adult salmon mortality. Understanding what is driving this rise in severity is vital to protect already vulnerable salmonid populations.

Our study spans 38 Scottish rivers and combines river water sampling, fish tissue isolation and environmental DNA (eDNA) analysis. Using baiting and selective culturing, alongside direct sampling from infected fish, we have processed nearly 2,100 samples. To date, 16 high-quality disease-associated isolates have been purified from fish tissue, with *S. parasitica* phylotype 2 overwhelmingly dominant.

Environmental sampling has revealed broader fungal and oomycete diversity (including *Pythium* and *Phytophythium* species), but disease cases remain strongly associated with phylotype 2.

Genomic analyses have provided particularly important insights. DNA analyses demonstrated that the river isolates are genetically very similar to each other. Furthermore, whole genome sequencing of eight *Saprolegnia* isolates from fish tissue, and one from river water, is underway.

eDNA sampling across ten rivers has revealed clear seasonal patterns in total biological load, typically peaking in summer and early autumn. Species-specific qPCR screening for *S. parasitica* is now underway and will enable us to move beyond presence/absence and quantify environmental abundance.

The next phase of the project integrates genomic data, qPCR results and environmental variables, including temperature and river flow, to identify predictors of outbreak risks. This will hopefully shift management from reactive responses to predictive understanding. Ultimately, the goal is to provide evidence that supports informed biosecurity, river management and long-term conservation of wild Atlantic salmon in Scotland.



Fig.1 | Salmon infected with *Saprolegnia parasitica*

Work underway to tackle a fresh batch of barriers to fish migration

Brian Davidson

Fisheries Management Scotland,
Director of Operations



In autumn 2025, Scottish Government and SEPA approached Fisheries Management Scotland to ask if our member network could deliver some fish barrier assessments prior to 31 March. This was a tight timescale, but it provided an opportunity for our members to initiate work on a range of priority barriers identified by SEPA. Fisheries Management Scotland worked both with Scottish Government to secure a grant and with our members to assess what might be possible to deliver in this timescale.

We had a very positive response from members, who saw the value in engaging in this project to improve fish passage – a key objective in many river catchments. We are pleased to report that of the 28 barriers identified by SEPA, 16 were assessed through a blend of our members' own expertise and through sub-contracting with specialist consultancies, allowing proposals to be developed for their easement or removal.

The work has highlighted three things:

- Recognition of the agility within Fisheries Management Scotland and members, enabling us to respond rapidly to opportunities that fit with both local priorities and national objectives;
- The reputation our network has established when it comes to delivering publicly funded projects;
- The benefits of working in a collaborative fashion with Scottish Government and agencies to deliver real environmental benefits which meet both local and national objectives.

We are grateful to Scottish Government and SEPA for looking to us as a delivery partner, and to those who contributed to the Project Governance Group, including Stuart Brabbs, Ayrshire Rivers Trust and Amy Fergusson, Forth Rivers Trust, who both provided significant technical expertise.



Strengthening commercial capability across our membership

Helen Feenan

Aquaculture Interactions Manager,
Fisheries Management Scotland

Over the coming year, we will develop a comprehensive work package designed to strengthen members' commercial capabilities and provide structured support for growing and managing commercial activities. This can apply to a range of opportunities, such as fisheries consultancies, river restoration and habitat enhancement contracts, fish population surveys, and catchment-scale monitoring programmes.

Members will also be supported to engage with both public and private sector opportunities in Scotland, including contracts with local authorities and Scottish Government, as well as work with private landowners, hydropower operators, renewable energy developers, estates, and infrastructure projects requiring environmental survey, mitigation and compliance services.

In addition, the increasing number of opportunities linked to nature finance and biodiversity markets will be explored, including biodiversity net gain-style approaches, natural capital investment, and emerging private finance mechanisms for nature restoration. These may generate new income streams through habitat creation and restoration projects, ecosystem service valuation and monitoring, carbon and peatland-related restoration schemes, and partnerships with developers and investors seeking to deliver measurable environmental outcomes alongside development.

This package will offer practical tools, processes and guidance to support informed decision-making across the full commercial lifecycle: from identifying opportunities and assessing feasibility, through to managing risk, ensuring compliance and overseeing delivery. The aim is to support members in developing sustainable commercial offers that maximise value while remaining aligned with legal requirements and our core purpose of protecting and restoring our rivers and the fish populations that rely on them.

The programme will be structured across five core areas.

1. **Foundations** will explore the benefits and opportunities of commercial work and introduce an opportunity categorisation and assessment framework to help prioritise projects.
2. **Financial guidance** will cover VAT and tax considerations, financial risk assessment, insurance requirements, costing and pricing tools, and benchmarking templates.
3. **Legal and compliance resources** will provide support on contract interpretation, liability, data and intellectual property considerations, alongside policy templates for fair work, health and safety, anti-slavery, equal opportunities and related requirements.
4. **Governance and risk materials** will include contract approval processes, audit readiness guidance, a contract management checklist and a contract register template to improve oversight and control.
5. **Business development guidance** will strengthen positioning, bid writing and social value proposals, alongside practical negotiation support.

Commercial ventures present significant opportunity but also legal, financial and operational risk. This package will improve market readiness, strengthen governance, enhance financial resilience and support members to compete effectively for external contracts.





Develop and maintain strong partnerships



Why collaboration is vital to save wild Atlantic salmon

Matthew Fleming

Chair, Missing Salmon Alliance



The challenge of wild salmon conservation is significant and complex. As with all significant challenges the solution will require a shared sense of purpose, collaborative endeavour and effective partnerships. For me, as a new chairman, the shared sense of purpose is critical, as it enables a group of outstanding organisations to work together and commit to strategies and solutions that put the plight of salmon first.

The challenges are on land, in river and ocean. The solutions require the understanding and support of politicians, policy makers, farmers, riparian owners, fishermen, the fishing industry, local communities, retailers, consumers and water companies – to name just some of the stakeholders who may impact wild salmon.

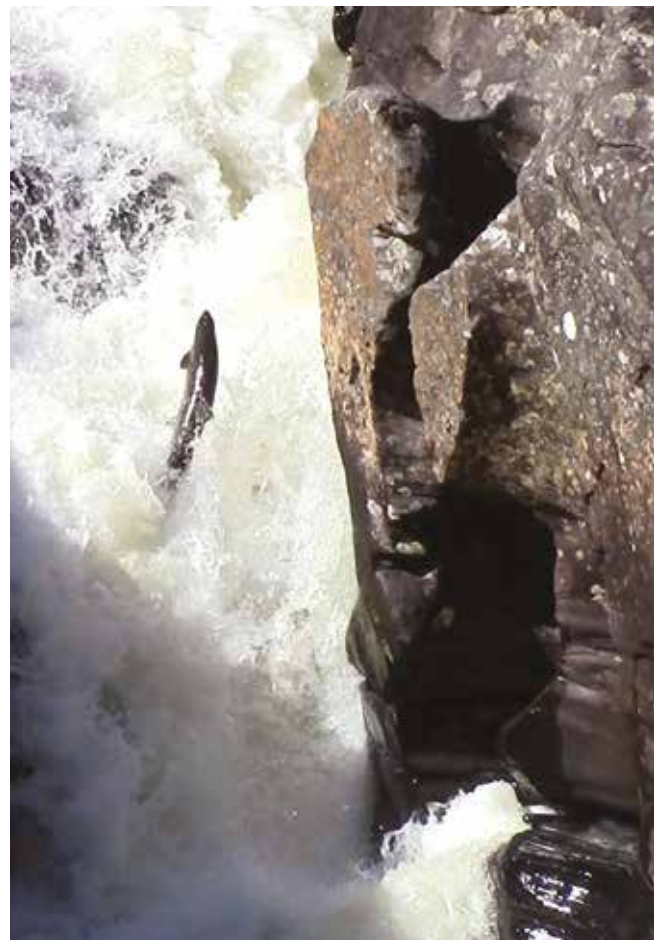
The statistics are terrifying and it is no exaggeration to say that wild Atlantic salmon are on the path from endangered to extinct without urgent action.

Improving wild salmon survival at sea is critical. The proportion of young salmon that return as adults has decreased from 20% to less than 5%. The open ocean is a huge part of the problem, but healthy coastal waters are also essential, and we are delighted that Blue Marine Foundation are working with the Missing Salmon Alliance (MSA) on this. We will need others to really make a difference too and we must empower action in rivers and engage communities to enable change.

Rivers Trusts, Fisheries Boards, catchment partnerships and NGOs all have the ability to deliver river restoration actions and the MSA is committed to empowering local transformative action in rivers. Community support and engagement is also vital to the success of river restoration projects. From anglers to ghillies, landowners to farmers and wider river communities, all are needed if we want to make transformational change.

We need to build evidence to support action at pace and at scale and we need to shine a light on the key pressures on wild Atlantic salmon and – crucially – the actions that need to be taken. Evidence is vital, in the form of input from stakeholders across the UK – not least organisations such as Marine Directorate, CEFAS, the Environment Agency and Natural Resources Wales.

The scale of the problem is significant and it will require every element of the MSA and the wider river communities to work together. We are delighted that FMS are leading members of the MSA and look forward to reporting how collaboration and partnership have been at the heart of improving the prospects for wild salmon.



Transforming river woodland restoration

Nicole Still

Riverwoods Project Manager,
Scottish Wildlife Trust



After several years of development by the Scottish Wildlife Trust, Fisheries Management Scotland and Woodland Trust Scotland the Digital Centre of Excellence – a key milestone for the pioneering Riverwoods Blueprint Project – has launched. Hosted by the Scottish Fisheries Coordination Centre, it provides vital support for river woodland restoration projects.

After years of neglect, Scotland's river woodlands – critical for maintaining water quality, biodiversity and climate resilience – are at great risk.

The Digital Centre of Excellence is paving the way for sustainable and successful restoration of these vital ecosystems by bringing together tools, data and practical examples from those already working on the ground.

This includes:

- A live project register of river woodland restoration efforts across Scotland.
- Best practice guidance and library.
- A data explorer for investigating restoration drivers and opportunities.
- Case studies.
- Training resources to engage and upskill community members.
- A library of external data portals and tools from across the sector.

Funding challenges are a common obstacle for many river woodland restoration projects. To address this, a cost calculator which allows individuals and organisations to get initial estimates for their project costs, and funding eligibility tool to recommend public funding options for development and delivery, will be added to the site later this year.

The Digital Centre of Excellence can be accessed via the Riverwoods website at www.riverwoods.org.uk, or by scanning the QR code below.

By working collaboratively, we can make restoration easier to design and more effective on the ground, ensuring our river woodlands continue to protect people and wildlife for generations to come.

We urge all Fisheries Management Scotland members, land managers, practitioners and community groups to make use of the new tools and help build a clearer picture of the critical work already taking place across Scotland.

The Digital Centre of Excellence has been developed as part of the Riverwoods Blueprint Project, with funding from The National Lottery Heritage Fund thanks to National Lottery players.

Read more:



Riverwoods: an overview

Riverwoods is a partnership initiative working to create a network of healthy river woodlands and resilient river systems across Scotland. Fisheries Management Scotland is a Riverwoods partner and plays a key role across several workstreams.

Advocacy

FMS chairs the advocacy group, which seeks to influence Scottish Government policy to ensure appropriate delivery and incentive mechanisms are in place to support river woodlands and river systems across Scotland.

Delivery

FMS also contributes to the delivery group, which brings together organisations which are practically delivering river restoration and creation projects. This group is a forum for sharing best practice and identifying barriers to activity.

Science

FMS sits on the science group, which consolidates academic and practitioner evidence on the multiple functions of Scotland's river woodlands, identifying gaps in knowledge and implementation needs. A key output of this group was the publication of the Riverwoods for Scotland Report on Scientific Evidence.

The Blueprint Project

The Blueprint Project currently sits at the core of Riverwoods partnership activities and aims to develop a practical blueprint for river woodland restoration and creation. In 2024, the project, led by the Scottish Wildlife Trust, was awarded £1.8 million by The National Lottery Heritage Fund, thanks to National Lottery players, to support delivery of the four-year programme. FMS is a partner in the Blueprint Project.

This was preceded by a development phase, where Riverwoods partners worked together to conduct research and devise a strategic plan for river woodland creation and restoration at scale.

Strategic oversight

Finally, FMS sits on the strategic oversight group, which provides strategic advice to the delivery, finance, science and advocacy groups, as well as guiding the overall direction of Riverwoods.

A delta of the River Feshie, lined by regenerating riparian woodlands in the Cairngorm National Park © Scotlandbigpicture.com



Build capacity and resilience



Working with Rivers internships: boosting fisheries management skills

Graeme Cullen

Manager, Scottish Fisheries Co-ordination Centre



I am delighted to report that the Working with Rivers initiative, a vital pathway into Scotland's fisheries and river restoration sector, has been funded for the third consecutive year. This initiative, delivered and funded in partnership with NatureScot, and significantly supported by Scottish and Southern Energy's Community Benefit Fund, will support paid placements to equip early career workers with practical skills needed to help conserve and manage freshwater ecosystems across Scotland.

The participating trusts in this year's programme are the Deveron, Bogie and Isla Rivers Charitable Trust; Findhorn, Nairn and Lossie Rivers Trust; Kyle of Sutherland Rivers Trust; Tay DSFB; Wester Ross Fisheries Trust; Loch Lomond Fisheries Trust; and the Spey Foundation.

At its heart, Working with Rivers responds to the twin challenges of biodiversity loss and climate change by building a skilled, motivated workforce capable of delivering strategic river restoration, natural flood management, invasive species control and riparian

habitat enhancement. Six-month placements with our members will give participants direct experience with real projects and fieldwork that underpin healthier river systems and help grow capacity within the host organisations.

We are hugely grateful to all funding partners – SSEN, NatureScot and our members – for working together to make this happen. The funding will allow our members to employ interns to assist with activities which are crucial to the health of Scotland's rivers. This includes the protection and conservation of river habitats, outreach with schools, aquatic monitoring, river restoration actions and invasive species control.

From a Fisheries Management Scotland perspective, Working with Rivers is essential, not only for skills development, but also for the future resilience of Scotland's freshwater fish populations and their habitats. By fostering practical expertise, enhancing cross-sector networks, and supporting the next generation of environmental professionals, the programme helps ensure our rivers are managed sustainably for nature and people alike.



A new future for Scotland's rivers

Paul Sizeland

Director for Nature Finance

Federica Foiadelli

Nature Finance Manager



Scotland's rivers are among the country's most ecologically important ecosystems. They shape our landscapes, run through our history and culture, and sustain wildlife, communities, and businesses. Yet Scotland's rivers are under mounting pressure. In order to drive action to restore rivers, we have been working over the last three years to realise a Scottish Rivers Fund.

Our work has been supported by three rounds of funding from the Facility for Investment Ready Nature in Scotland (FIRNS) programme¹ with additional support from the Golden Bottle Trust. When launched, the fund will be hosted by NatureScot and will benefit from the experience of delivering the Scottish Marine Environmental Enhancement Fund (SMEEF). Over the last four years, SMEEF has mobilised over £10 million. We aim to build on that success to bring much needed finance, sourced from businesses, to support river restoration action across Scotland.



¹ FIRNS is delivered by NatureScot in collaboration with The Scottish Government and in partnership with the National Lottery Heritage Fund

Federica Foiadelli joined us in August as Nature Finance Manager and her role is fully funded by the project. Federica brings a wealth of experience gained from an international career in economics, impact finance and advocacy, including in the agri-food sector and supply chain resilience. This has enabled her to hit the ground running in developing the Scottish Rivers Fund. Over the past year we have been working closely with NatureScot staff and a project steering group, with a focus on four key areas:

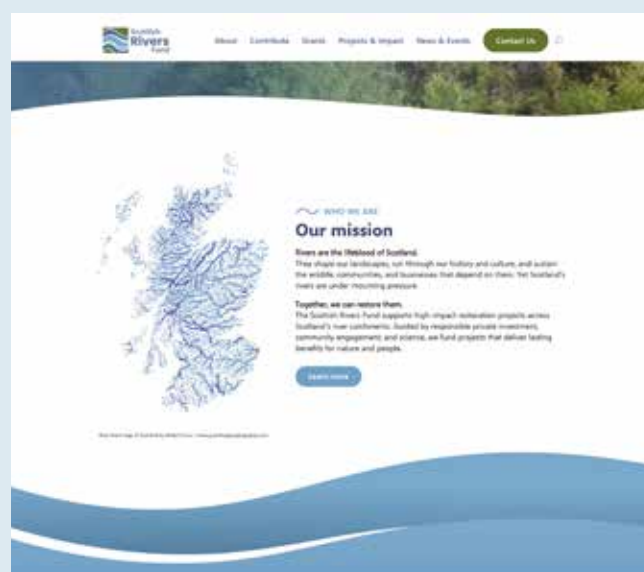
- Engaging with businesses and other stakeholders to secure contributions.
- Ensuring readiness for NatureScot to host the fund beyond March.
- Designing and testing the fund's application process with the support of FMS members.
- Developing the brand, website and associated marketing materials to establish the identity of the fund and support external outreach activities.

The fund has been designed so that its objectives and configuration can directly respond to the environmental, social and governance (ESG) and corporate responsibility commitments of many businesses – from family-owned companies looking to make a difference to their local environment, to multinational enterprises with ambitious sustainability goals. In the first instance, the fund is not designed to secure units or credits. It will therefore complement other nature-related initiatives, including credit-based mechanisms.

We have had many one-to-one exploratory and follow-up meetings with potential contributors, with an initial focus on the energy and food and drink sectors. We have also held online and face-to-face engagement events with businesses using FMS members' projects as excellent examples to promote potential outcomes of the fund. Market signals indicate that the type of voluntary, ESG-driven finance we are seeking is available, but we recognise we are operating in a competitive marketplace. We are therefore also seeking advice from marketing experts to inform our future marketing strategy.

The fund will incorporate a bespoke monitoring framework to account for project impacts and approaches to community engagement alongside project development and delivery. A key focus for us has been to ensure that the fund operates in a way that is accessible and effective. We therefore enlisted the help of five FMS member organisations, who participated in a comprehensive exercise to test the fund's application process, draft templates and monitoring requirements.

We are now in the final stages of development before the fund is launched later this year. The core foundations, including its brand identity, are in place and the website (www.riversfund.scot) is now live. Our priority is to seek early supporters: individuals and organisations, sharing our passion for Scotland's rivers, who are also willing to enable the first wave of river restoration projects across Scotland.



This crucial support will allow us to build a fund which supports high-impact restoration projects, guided by responsible private investment, community engagement and science, which deliver lasting benefits for nature and people. If you can support the Scottish Rivers Fund, we would love to hear from you.



Finance, capacity and governance for the future

Julia McCarthy

Wild Salmon Conservation Manager,
Fisheries Management Scotland



Scotland's Wild Salmon Strategy recognises the important contribution that district salmon fishery boards (DSFBs), the River Tweed Commission (RTC), and rivers and fisheries trusts make to wild fisheries management and habitat restoration. However, the strategy also recognises that there are inherent difficulties in the current system, particularly in ensuring income streams are sufficient and consistent enough to deliver this important work.

We are in no doubt about the ongoing financial challenges being faced by local managers, in the face of declines in wild salmon and sea trout populations. The valuation of fisheries is closely tied to salmon and sea trout catches. With declining catches in recent years, assessments increasingly impose a proportionally greater financial burden on proprietors. Alongside this, the current financial climate for UK charities is highly challenging, with funding as competitive as ever.

Against this background, FMS were delighted to take the lead on Action 5.1 of the Wild Salmon Strategy Implementation Plan "to examine new ways in which we can better support and resource local management". FMS led a group that tested a series of challenges and recommendations through a structured survey and FMS member engagement. In thinking about resourcing local management, the group concluded that issues related to finance and resourcing cannot be looked at in isolation from inherent issues associated with the governing legislation for freshwater fisheries in Scotland. The final report was presented to the Scottish Government in September 2025.

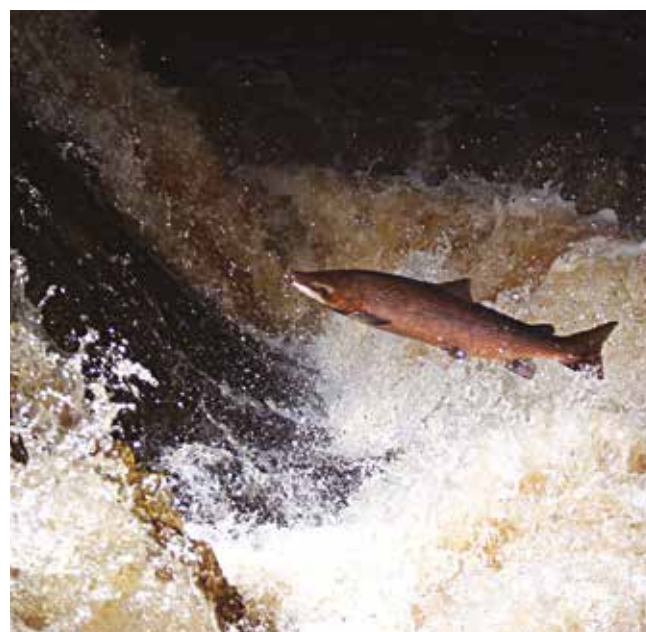
Read more:



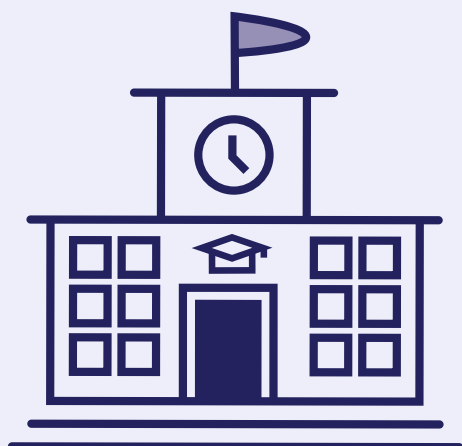
The final report sets out the history and impact of fisheries management in Scotland and identifies five key challenges: dependence on the fishery assessment as an unsustainable funding model; capacity; governance and constitution; ensuring sustainable fisheries contributions across Scotland; and securing and sustaining public funding.

Having considered these challenges in detail, the group agreed on 20 recommendations to include in the final report to Scottish Government. These recommendations cover a wide range of issues, including reform of the fisheries assessment process; legislative changes to support DSFBs; public funding; water user levies; commercial work; public good contracts; ringfenced environmental fines; and nature finance.

We are working hard to put these recommendations into action, including the identification of 'quick wins'. Ultimately, we want to see the wild fisheries sector supported by a modernised, and fit-for-purpose assessment system, complemented by a broader and more resilient mix of public, private, and user-based funding sources. If we can achieve this, it will ensure that our sector can deliver a wide range of public and environmental benefits in an even more effective manner and at greater scale.

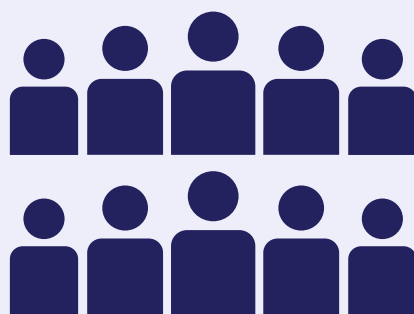


Our members' impact

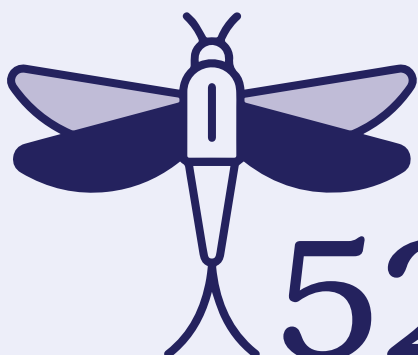


Worked with **192** schools
and reached out to **6,258**
pupils to educate them
about fish

1,052



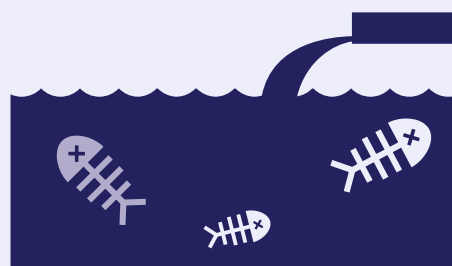
Volunteers engaged
across Scotland



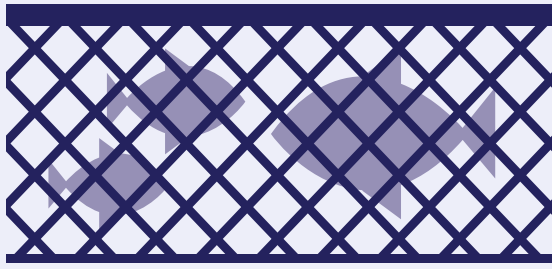
523

Sites surveyed for
invertebrate populations

68



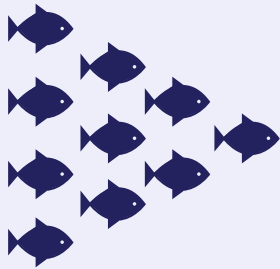
Pollution incidents and
other infringements were
reported to **SEPA**



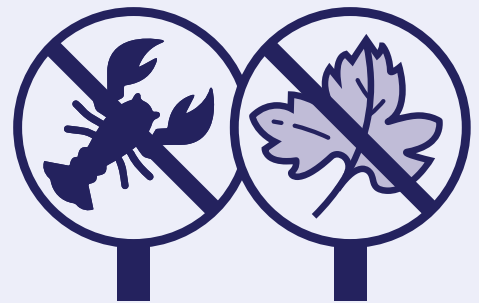
602 Fish poaching incidents recorded and **66** illegal instruments seized

1,939

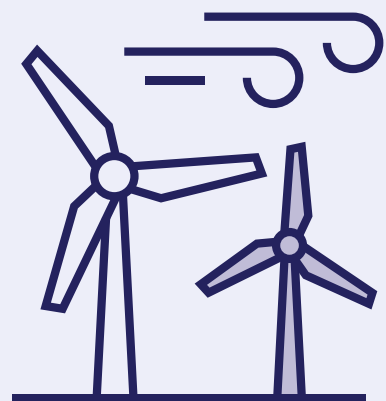
Sites surveyed for juvenile fish populations



Our members responded to 318 local developments to help protect wild fish. These include developments such as fish farms, wind farms, hydropower and many other local proposals



2,500km
Of riverbank invasive species managed by our members



318

The case for a healthy supply of gravel

Brian Shaw

Director, Ness District
Salmon Fishery Board



While cold, clean water might form the key requirement for salmonids, for a fish that builds nests in the riverbed to protect its eggs, there is no doubt that suitable gravel is another essential feature.

The egg incubation and alevin stages of salmon and trout can last for many months and healthy salmonid populations thrive with well-distributed, high-quality spawning gravel.

However, suitable spawning gravel is in short supply in many rivers. In areas subject to diffuse pollution pressures, for example, siltation has had a significant impact on the viability of trout and salmon populations. Poor quality gravel can result in reduced recruitment, and smaller, less fit fry.

Equally, the impact of impoundments (weirs/dams) on sediment movements is now recognised as one of the major factors affecting salmonid populations. Large impoundments can cut off the gravel supply completely, as can often be seen downstream from big hydroelectricity dams.

In the Ness catchment, sediment starvation is considered as one of the limiting factors in its major salmon producing tributaries. In 2024, we commissioned consultants to produce a geomorphology survey of the River Moriston, which confirmed the shortage of suitable spawning gravel downstream of Dundreggan Dam. We are now seeking permission from landowners and regulators to introduce 400 tonnes of gravel suitable for spawning into the lower River Moriston.

Our electrofishing data from the lower Moriston highlighted the skewed distribution of salmon fry recruitment below the dam and will allow us to monitor the success of this intervention should it take place.



One river, many roles

Duncan Ferguson

Operations Manager,
Spey Fishery Board



I started working on the Spey in 1990 as a river watcher for the local angling club. Back then, poaching was rife and life was very different from today, with no mobile phones and very poor communications. Thermal imaging equipment was in its infancy and we had six full-time bailiffs. We now have a team of three who are embracing new technology and thinking smarter about how the river is policed.

The range of my experience has allowed me to deeply understand the river's physical characteristics, ecology, and the communities who rely on it. And I've been incredibly fortunate to build extensive relationships with estate managers, ghillies, anglers, scientists and public agencies in the catchment. This has given me an understanding of fisheries enforcement, river conditions and habitat challenges. Meanwhile a combination of hands-on field experience and management responsibility ensures that conservation strategies translate into real improvements in the river.

Climate change is only one of several pressures facing the Spey. For example, hydroelectric infrastructure in the upper catchment has altered water flow and sediment transport, reducing habitat quality for salmon in certain areas. We've lost around 61% of the upper river to abstraction, which is slowly killing it. What was considered good practice 80 years ago definitely needs to be re-evaluated if the river is to survive.

Having gone through an organisational review, we have built a small but proactive team that is determined to deliver meaningful change and hopefully secure the future of the river, its ecosystem, and the communities and industries that rely on it being clean, cold and healthy.



A new biologist with big ambitions at Lochaber Fisheries Trust

Antony Smith

Senior Biologist & Trust Manager,
Lochaber Fisheries Trust



I took up the post of Senior Biologist and Trust Manager in August and quickly became involved in a busy programme of electrofishing, while also learning the ropes of sea lice monitoring – a new experience for me. I moved to the Highlands from North Wales, where I completed a PhD on Arctic char. Following this, I worked for APEM as a Senior Freshwater Fisheries Consultant and in river restoration with the North Wales Rivers Trust.

It was exciting to attend this year's SFCC Biologists' Conference for the first time and hear about the wide range of interesting work that other Trusts and Boards are involved in, while also gaining a greater appreciation of the strong and integrated fisheries community across Scotland. It was particularly encouraging to see the emphasis on evidence-based management and conservation.

As a west coast trust, LFT has a strong focus on understanding the impacts of aquaculture. We survey sea lice burdens across seven sites, expanding to eight in 2026, and monitor genetic introgression from escapees. Following the escape of a large number of farmed salmon from Gorsten, on Loch Linnhe, this winter, our genetics work is also expanding, with a three-year programme of genetic surveillance starting this year across five rivers.

Beyond 2026, we are assessing several potential restoration projects, including tree planting, barrier removals and INNS treatment. On the monitoring side, we aim to initiate new smolt and adult monitoring projects and expand juvenile density surveys as part of a strategic core monitoring programme for the Lochaber region. As an Arctic char enthusiast, I'm also keen to develop an Arctic char project.

Hopefully the next few years will be an exciting time for the Lochaber Fisheries Trust, and I look forward to meeting more people and developing collaborations.



Guardians of the Tweed

Erica Chapman

Volunteer Coordinator,
Tweed Foundation



The Tweed Foundation's volunteer programme entered an exciting new phase at the end of 2025, following support from the Fallago Environment Fund, which provided match funding alongside investment from the Tweed Foundation. This combined funding enabled the appointment of a full-time volunteer coordinator, strengthening the foundation's capacity to support community involvement across the catchment.

Building on an established network of dedicated riverfly monitors, the programme has expanded into a broader citizen science initiative, attracting interest from communities throughout the Tweed and Eye Water catchments. Volunteers are now involved in a wide range of activities: including tree planting; aquatic invertebrate and macrophyte sampling and analysis; and supporting research into the levels of predation from fish-eating birds.

Central to this work is the "Guardians of the Tweed" initiative – a growing volunteer network focused on protecting the river's long-term health through hands-on conservation, habitat restoration and data collection. The initiative continues to gain momentum locally, reflecting both strong community engagement and the value of volunteer contributions.

As the programme develops, new volunteer-led projects are being introduced, including invasive Himalayan balsam control, support for electrofishing surveys, habitat assessments and water quality testing. Additional activities – such as bird counting, scale reading, trout monitoring, biosecurity checking, and TweedStart educational sessions – further broaden participation and skills development.

Together, the Guardians of the Tweed are creating a committed network of people dedicated to protecting the catchment. Their work supports wildlife, sustains local angling traditions and empowers communities to play an active role in caring for their shared environment – helping to ensure resilience in the catchment for future generations.



The importance of small streams as fish habitat

Paul Hopper

Senior Biologist,
Outer Hebrides Fisheries Trust



There is a recurring challenge in the management and protection of small watercourses in Scotland, particularly in areas like the Western Isles, where there are extensive lengths of small streams which are important to native salmonid fish. Many of these smaller systems are unclassified within the River Basin Management Planning (RBMP) framework and therefore omitted from SEPA's formal monitoring and improvement programmes.

This is especially significant considering the wild salmon crisis, and the evidence showing that Atlantic salmon utilise interconnected loch habitats that are accessed by way of these small streams.

To highlight the importance of small water bodies, Outer Hebrides Fisheries Trust (OHFT) presented information to the FMS-SEPA National Engagement Forum, including a local example (Loch Snathaid, South Uist) to highlight the importance of these streams for habitat and spawning of migratory salmonids. SEPA held records for only one licensed structure at Loch Snathaid, the water body itself is unclassified and was not identified through the RBMP process. OHFT staff have identified three substantial barriers to fish movement that were unknown to SEPA and not captured within RBMPs.

Outer Hebrides Fisheries Trust and FMS are also engaging with SEPA's Safeguarding Scotland's Water Environment consultation, so that greater attention is afforded to small water bodies in the hope they can be included in future RBMPs.



Can waste scallop shells reduce river acidification?

Kacie Jess

Project Manager (River Restoration),
Galloway Fisheries Trust



The River Bladnoch Scallop Shell Project aims to investigate the potential use of waste scallop shells for mitigating acidification in watercourses. The project is looking at both terrestrial and instream applications to determine whether the shells can have a positive impact on the river's acidified tributaries.

The terrestrial application involved laying 680 tonnes of crushed king scallop shells along forest tracks. Instream application involved hand-placing 12 tonnes of whole queen scallop shells into three highly acidified watercourses, which included two drainage ditches and one larger burn. Project works were carried out in spring 2024, following baseline data collection.

Monitoring for this novel trial will run for five years, and will include spot sampling in all weather and flow conditions, constant water quality monitoring, fish and invertebrate monitoring, and visual surveys. Sites were selected based on previous water quality data collected by GFT, which highlighted areas where pH often dropped to 4 or lower and remained consistently acidified.

Preliminary results suggest scallop shells have a significant impact on the pH of watercourses during prolonged low flows, but this is reduced at times of flooding, due to the increased volume and flow of the water. However, the main interest is to determine whether the shells help watercourses recover faster from acid flushes, which could help improve invertebrate and fish populations. Galloway has significant acidification problems resulting from historical poor land use decisions and naturally poorly buffered soils. The extensive drainage of deep peat in the uplands, largely for conifer afforestation, was particularly damaging for water quality. Higher environmental standards in forestry, restructuring of old-style forests, improving air quality and targeted peatland restoration are all starting to improve water quality, but it will take time.

Further data collection will provide insight into whether scallop shells can be used to support short-term acidification recovery in watercourses while wider ecosystem restoration is undertaken.

Delivery partners are GFT (project manager), Bladnoch DSFB, Forestry and Land Scotland and Scottish Woodlands. All work was agreed with SEPA and NatureScot. The project was funded by GFT and the Salmon Scotland Wild Fisheries Fund.



Our funding

Our work at Fisheries Management Scotland is reliant on the support of our members, who provide the core funding for our activities. We use this core funding to leverage funding from a range of other sources. These include grant funding for specific projects from the Scottish Government, Marine Fund Scotland, Crown Estate Scotland, NatureScot, SEPA and the National Lottery Heritage Fund. We are also incredibly grateful to the Missing Salmon Alliance, Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and the Golden Bottle Trust for their generous support of key initiatives. We receive no direct funding from industry.

The strength of Fisheries Management Scotland lies in our collective effort. Our members are at the heart of protecting Scotland's wild salmon, native fish and the rivers and lochs they depend on. In 2025/26, over £950,000 in grant funding was secured to support local management or distributed directly to our members to support their vital work. This in addition to the figures in the graphic to the right.

The majority of our expenditure covers our staff team, who are dedicated to advocating for the restoration and protection of Scotland's rivers and lochs. Full details can be found in our latest accounts which are published at: www.fms.scot

*(The financial graphic on this page is provisional.
Pending approval of our 2025/26 annual accounts)*



District Salmon Fishery Boards

- | | |
|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. Caithness | 21. Annan |
| 2. Helmsdale | 22. Nith |
| 3. Brora | 23. Urr |
| 4. Kyle of Sutherland | 24. Dee (Kirkcudbright) |
| 5. Cromarty | 25. Fleet (Kirkcudbright) |
| 6. Beaully | 26. Cree |
| 7. Ness | 27. Bladnoch |
| 8. Nairn | 28. Luce |
| 9. Findhorn | 29. Stinchar |
| 10. Lossie | 30. Girvan |
| 11. Spey | 31. Doon |
| 12. Deveron | 32. Ayr |
| 13. Ugie | 33. Eachaig |
| 14. Ythan | 34. Argyll |
| 15. Don | 35. Laggan & Sorn |
| 16. Dee (Aberdeenshire) | 36. Lochaber |
| 17. Esk | 37. Wester Ross |
| 18. Tay | 38. Western Isles |
| 19. Forth | 39. North & West |
| 20. Tweed | 40. Northern |

Sources:

Source: SFD / DSFB boundaries, SEPA (2009) & SG MS (2020) Some features of this map are based on digital spatial data licensed from Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, © NERC. © Crown copyright and database rights (2021) OS (100024655). Projection: British National Gr



Rivers and Fisheries Trusts

- | | |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| 1. Kyle of Sutherland Fisheries Trust | 14. River Annan Trust |
| 2. Cromarty Firth Fisheries Trust | 15. Nith Catchment Fisheries Trust |
| 3. Ness & Beaully Fisheries Trust | 16. Galloway Fisheries Trust |
| 4. Findhorn, Nairn & Lossie Rivers Trust | 17. Ayrshire Rivers Trust |
| 5. Spey Foundation | 18. Clyde River Foundation |
| 6. Deveron, Bogie & Isla Rivers Charitable Trust | 19. Loch Lomond Fisheries Trust |
| 7. River Ythan Trust | 20. Argyll Fisheries Trust |
| 8. River Don Trust | 21. Lochaber Fisheries Trust |
| 9. River Dee Trust | 22. Outer Hebrides Fisheries Trust |
| 10. The Esk Rivers Fisheries Trust | 23. Skye & Lochalsh Rivers Trust |
| 11. Tay Rivers Trust | 24. Wester Ross Fisheries Trust |
| 12. Forth Rivers Trust | 25. West Sutherland Fisheries Trust |
| 13. Tweed Foundation | 26. Flow Countries Rivers Trust |
| | 27. Orkney Waters Trust |

Sources:

Source: Fisheries Trust Boundaries, SEPA (2009) & SG MS (2021) Some features of this map are based on digital spatial data licensed from Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, © NERC. © Crown copyright and database rights (2021) OS (100024655). Projection: British National Grid GIS Ref: gji1197



We need your help!

Our wild salmon face a range of pressures and we need to understand when and where these pressures are taking place. Non-native pink salmon, outbreaks of fish disease, seal predation and escaped farmed fish in Scotland's rivers can cause serious problems for our native wild Atlantic salmon and freshwater fish. In order to fully understand

the extent and severity of these issues across Scotland, we need your help to report problems using our online apps.

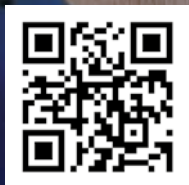
Please download and use these apps to help us address the range of pressures which our wild salmon and freshwater fish face.



Report fish disease



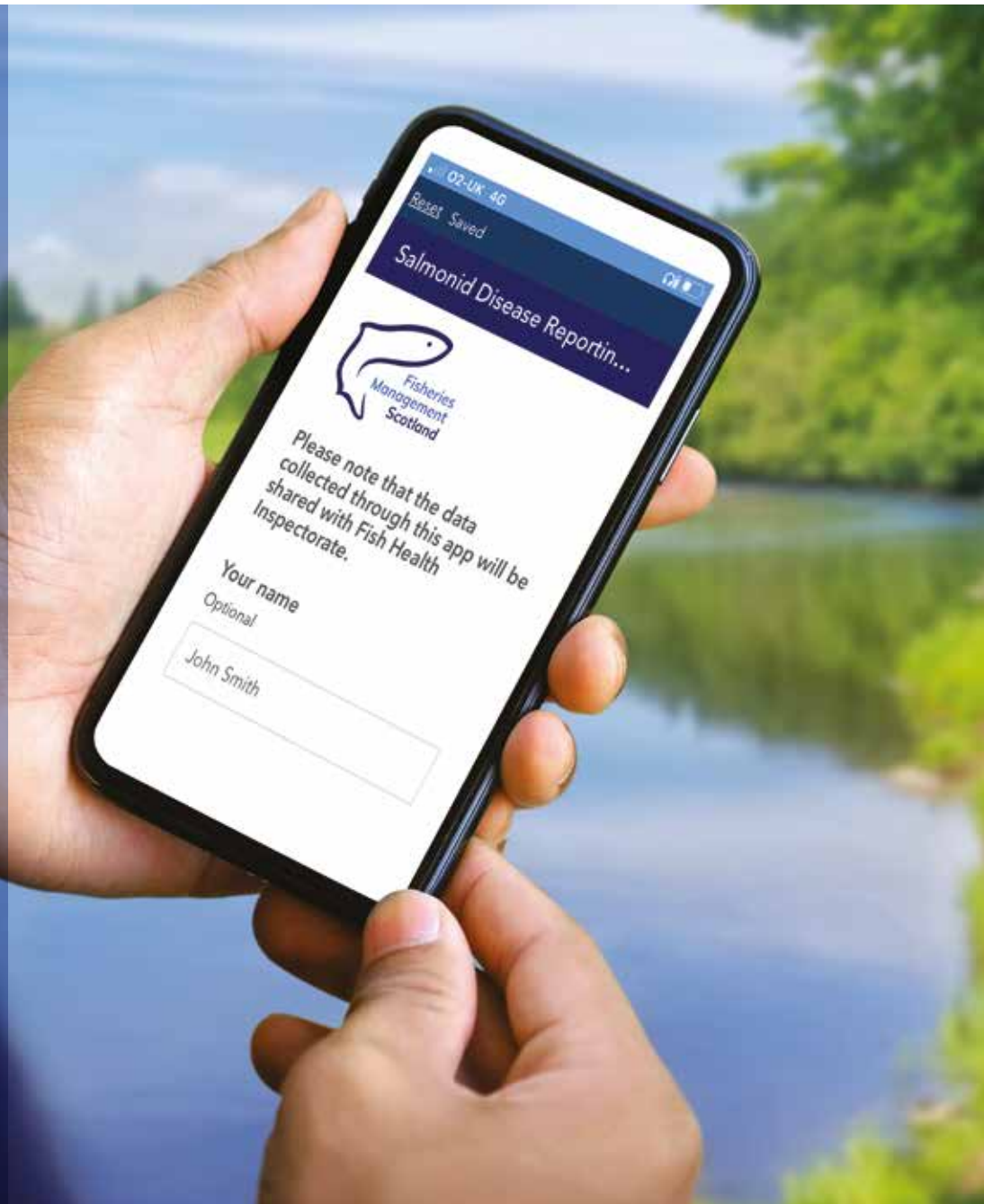
Report pink salmon



Report farmed
fish escapes



Report in-river seal
sightings



Make a report here -
<https://fms.scot/make-a-report/>

Fisheries Management Scotland Directors

Richard Davies - Outer Hebrides

Guy Harris - Early Career Representative (to November 2025)

Amelia Heath - Forth

Edward Humphrey - Dee

David Johnstone - Annan (Chair)

Lorna Lyle - Northern

Ann-Marie MacMaster - Early Career Representative

Claire Mercer-Nairne - Tay (to March 2026)

Richard Miller - Deveron

Edward Mountain - Spey

Jamie Ribbens - Galloway

Richard Sankey - Kyle of Sutherland (Chair to March 2025)

Sandy Scott - Spey (to March 2025)

Brian Shaw - Ness

Jamie Stewart - Tweed

Robert White - Tay

Robert Younger - Argyll

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