

Fisheries Management Scotland Guidance: What to do if you capture a farmed fish

Purpose

Escaped farmed fish can damage the genetic integrity of wild populations and can also indicate where best aquaculture practices are not being followed. Where genetic introgression may not be a risk, negative consequences are observed through competition for food and habitat and predation on wild fish.

The purpose of this document is to set out clear guidance on how to identify a farmed fish and what should be done in the case of positive identification. This document is not specific to any particular escape and applies to any farmed fish found in the wild. This document should be shared with fishery owners, angling clubs, ghillies and anglers to ensure a consistent approach is applied.

It is important to emphasise the following points:

- Escaped farmed fish **do not** form part of the calculation of rateable values for salmon fisheries in Scotland. Reporting farmed salmon will therefore **not** lead to an increase in rateable value of your fishery.
- It is important that these fish are reported to Fisheries Management Scotland and the Fish Health Inspectorate.
- It is important, in addition to reporting escaped farmed fish to Fisheries Management Scotland and the Fish Health Inspectorate, that all farmed fish caught are reported to Marine Scotland in your annual catch return. Escaped fish are reported separately and do not contribute to the wild salmon catch statistics.
- Marine Scotland Science do not include farmed salmon in the annual conservation assessments.
- Marine Scotland do not consider the killing of farmed fish on a Category 3 River to be a breach of the 2016 Conservation regulations.

The collection of data and consistent approach to notification of authorities of escaped farmed fish will improve the knowledge base and consequential management opportunities in this area. This will also support Scotland in meeting its requirement to report on progress towards achieving the international North Atlantic Salmon Conservation organisation (NASCO) goal of “100% farmed fish to be retained in all production facilities” on an annual basis.

Is it a farmed fish?

[Scottish Government advice](#) lists the following characteristics to look out for when identifying a farmed fish (see pictures at Annex 1):

- Deformed or shortened fins (especially the dorsal, pectoral and tail fins)
- Deformed or shortened gill covers (may be only on one side)
- Deformed or shortened snout

- Heavy pigmentation (spots more numerous than are usual on wild salmon)¹

If a fish exhibits two or more of these characteristics it should be classed as a farmed origin fish. In addition, farmed fish may also have a higher number of dark spots, particularly below the lateral line, than would be expected on wild fish.

What should be done if a farmed fish is caught?

If a fish is clearly identified as of a farmed origin the fish should be humanely dispatched. The Marine Scotland Fish Health Inspectorate should be contacted to alert them to the capture of the escaped farmed fish. This report should include date of capture, river of capture and a photograph of the fish if possible. **Due to the need to maintain a withdrawal period following any sea lice or medicinal treatments of the farmed fish, on no account should the fish be kept or consumed.**

Fish Health Inspectorate Contact Details – Available 24/7

Email: ms.fishhealth@gov.scot

Phone during normal business hours: 0131 244 3498

Phone outside normal business hours: 0131 244 1833

The local [District Salmon Fishery Board \(DSFB\) or Fisheries Trust](#) should also be contacted so they can sample as necessary. If there is no local Board or Trust, the Fish Health Inspectorate (FHI) may request for a scale sample to be collected and submitted.

If fishing on a ghillied beat, ghillies should be contacted in the case of a suspected farmed salmon to support the identification. This is simply to avoid unnecessary deaths to wild salmon and where applicable limit risk of being in breach of conservation regulations (see What if I have caught the fish on a Category 3 river?)

Please use our [app](#) to record information to ensure Fisheries Management Scotland have the details of the escaped fish.

What if I have caught the fish on a Category 3 river?

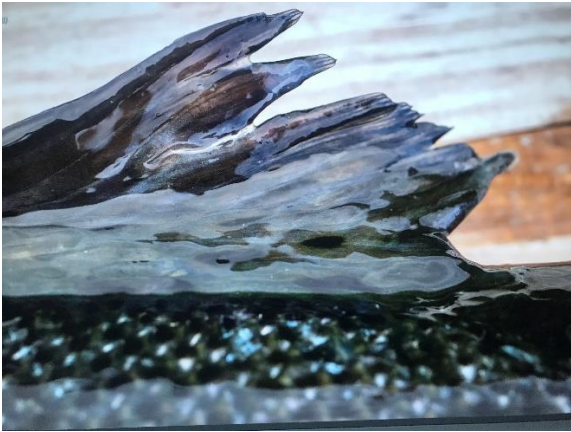
The Conservation of Salmon (Scotland) Regulations 2016 ('the 2016 Regulations') came into force in 2016, meaning that if fishing on a Category 3 river, Catch and Release is mandatory. The Regulations do not apply to commercially farmed fish. It is important to be sure that the fish is of farmed origin to avoid accidental killing of wild salmon. As stated above, farmed fish should not be retained or consumed by any angler.

What will the scales be used for?

It is not always easy to tell a farmed salmon from a wild one, particularly if the fish has been in the wild for some time. Scales are a useful way of confirming that a fish was from a farmed origin. Rings on the scale, known as scale circuli, on farmed fish may exhibit continual, uniform growth prior to suspected escape, whereas in contrast circuli on wild fish make it possible to identify winter periods spent in freshwater as a juvenile and time spent at sea.

¹ Text taken Scottish Government website - <https://www2.gov.scot/Topics/marine/Salmon-Trout-Coarse/fishreform/licence/farmedfish>

Annex 1



Damage to the dorsal fin

Image: Outer Hebrides Fisheries Trust



Damage to the pectoral fin

Image: Outer Hebrides Fisheries Trust



Shortened gill covers (gills visible)

Image: Ness DSFB



Escaped Salmon

Image: Loch Lomond Angling Improvement Association