2025
ANNUAL REVIEW

Fisheries Management Scotland

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, regulation 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

Richard Sankey

Chairman, Fisheries
Management Scotland

I have always maintained that if we can address the pressures that wild salmon, sea trout and other species face, they will recover. It is encouraging that some rivers had strong catches of salmon in 2024 – indeed the preliminary 2024 catch statistics show that salmon catches were above the ten year average. Unfortunately catches of sea trout continue to decline. Whilst these trends were not apparent across all Scottish rivers, it is important to celebrate success and demonstrate that we can make a real difference, and that is a theme that we return to throughout this review.

Fisheries Management Scotland plays a unique and irreplaceable role in Scotland's fisheries sector. As the only national representative body for fisheries managers, we are well positioned to advocate for our members and drive meaningful change. No other organisation combines the local expertise of our network with the ability to engage at a national level – working closely with Government, agencies, industry and stakeholders to secure the best outcomes for our freshwater environment. While we remain a relatively small organisation, our impact is amplified through effective partnerships, ensuring that the interests of Scotland's rivers and fisheries are championed at every level.

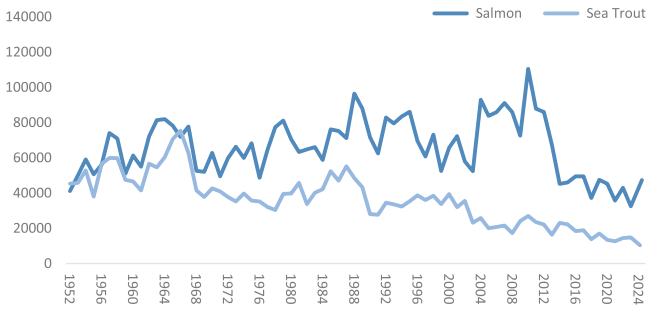
We have had another productive year and throughout the pages of this review you will see examples of work which will help to protect and restore our rivers. Our work on nature finance continues to progress and we hope to launch a Scottish Rivers Fund later this year. Public funding has again played a significant role in supporting fisheries management over the past year, enabling FMS to coordinate crucial national projects, including the National Adult Salmon Sampling Programme, and ongoing sea lice monitoring on wild sea trout. We are playing an important role in supporting the delivery of Scotland's Wild Salmon Strategy.

Beyond delivering conservation work, raising awareness is key. Our collaboration with the Missing Salmon Alliance (MSA) has helped amplify the message about the plight of wild salmon, and we were delighted to participate in Wild Salmon Connections, an international conference in London which showcased efforts to protect wild salmon for future generations.

Having spent six years as chairman of Fisheries Management Scotland, I will be stepping down from the role later this year. We have worked hard to grow the capacity of the organisation and – crucially – we have done so without creating an additional financial burden on our members. I have the utmost confidence that Fisheries Management Scotland is in an excellent position to continue its vital work, with a strong team and a clear direction for the future. I look forward to cheering you on from the sidelines and take great pride in having been part of this chapter of Fisheries Management Scotland's journey.

Photo: Sean Dugan

Annual Salmon & Sea Trout Catches Scotland 1952-2024*



Source – Marine Scotland Science © Crown copyright.
* 2024 figures are provisional

Chief Executive's Introduction

Alan Wells

Chief Executive,
Fisheries Management Scotland

This past year has been a testament to the power of collective action in tackling the challenges facing Scotland's wild fisheries, proving that recovery is possible when we work together. Climate change, habitat loss and human pressures continue to threaten wild salmon and sea trout, as well as the habitats they depend on, but the commitment of our members and partners has never been stronger. Across Scotland, dedicated efforts are making a tangible difference – from habitat restoration and scientific monitoring, to advocacy that ensures fisheries management remains high on the policy agenda.

While we continue to highlight the scale of the challenge we face, we must also celebrate the progress being made. That's why this review features examples of bold, evidence-based solutions that are delivering real results and offering hope for the future of Scotland's rivers and wild fish.

However, there is no room for complacency. We need sustained investment, better regulation, and stronger policies that support our shared goals. Our members – alongside Scotland's anglers, ghillies, and conservation partners – are the guardians of our rivers and backbone of this work, but we cannot do it alone.

I encourage you to engage with this review, learn from the inspiring stories within, and think about how you can contribute to the future of Scotland's rivers and wild fish. Whether through advocacy, collaboration or direct support, your involvement matters now more than ever.

Our Goals

- Deliver value to our members to support conservation, restoration, protection and management
- Amplify our community's voice through strong advocacy and meaningful engagement
- Develop and maintain strong partnerships
- Build capacity and resilience within our membership
- Build capacity and resilience in Fisheries Management Scotland

Fisheries Management Scotland

Our Year in Review

2024

FEB

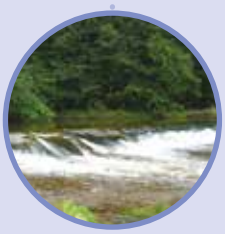
SEPA launch Sea Lice Regulatory Framework

MAR

FMS establish group through the Wild Salmon Strategy to develop new funding streams for local fisheries management

Fisheries Management Plans go live

APRIL



First SEPA National Engagement Forum convened by FMS

FMS secures funding to develop a Scottish Rivers Fund

AUG

SFCC delivers freshwater pearl mussel survey training

SEPT

Alan Wells gives evidence to Rural Affairs and Islands Committee on the Scottish Government Budget

OCT

Sean Robertson presents Fisheries Management Plans at ESRI Scottish Conference

FMS and Fish Vet Society host fish health workshop

Over the past year, we have achieved significant milestones in fisheries management, conservation and advocacy. From securing funding for vital projects to delivering training and influencing national discussions, our efforts are helping shape the future of Scotland's rivers and aquatic ecosystems. Read more about these events and their impact in the following pages.

MAY

FMS submit recommendations to Scottish Government to increase penalties for fish poaching offences

JUNE

FMS secures funding for national projects on AI fish counters and biosecurity

Alan Wells gives evidence in Parliament on salmon farming in Scotland

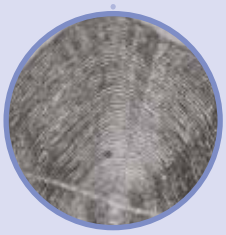
JULY

SFCC deliver electrofishing training

NOV

FMS hosts workshops to collect FMS member input into the development of the Scottish Rivers Fund

DEC



SFCC delivers scale reading course

2025

JAN

Missing Salmon Alliance hosts Wild Salmon Connections at Fishmongers Hall in London

Riverwoods Blueprint Project delivery phase begins

Catch and release best practice guidance launched

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

Fisheries Management Plans

In March 2024, we launched a groundbreaking fisheries management planning initiative, delivering two major outputs: 44 local Fisheries Management Plans (FMPs) and a national dashboard of management actions. Geographic Information Systems (GIS) technology was used to map, analyse and visualise data, to guide management decisions through spatially accurate and up-to-date information. This project, funded by Crown Estate Scotland and the Scottish Government (via Marine Fund Scotland), marks a significant improvement in coordinated, evidence-based fisheries management, helping to inform both local and national conservation efforts with the best available information.

44 Fisheries Management Plans

For the first time, all 44 fisheries districts across Scotland have developed standardised Fisheries Management Plans, following a template developed by the Scottish Fisheries Coordination Centre (SFCC). These plans document key management actions tailored to local fisheries, covering critical areas such as fish populations, catchment characteristics, pressures, monitoring efforts, and priorities for management action.

To enhance accessibility and engagement, the plans have been transformed from static reports into dynamic, interactive digital formats, integrating maps, data layers and multimedia content.

> "Whether our member organisations are communicating with local residents, volunteers, landowners or government agencies, the ArcGIS story maps enable them to really demonstrate the value that their planned interventions can bring to the freshwater environment."
>
> Sean Robertson, SFCC Manager

National dashboard of actions

We also launched in parallel a national dashboard of fisheries management actions, providing an interactive, high-level view of over 1,300 planned conservation interventions. The dashboard allows users to explore where and how management actions are being implemented across Scotland and compare priorities at regional and national levels.

A key insight from this national dataset is the significant funding gap facing Scotland's rivers. The data reveal that over £250 million is required to adequately protect and restore river catchments, far exceeding the availability of current public funding sources.

To address this challenge, FMS is developing a Scottish Rivers Fund – a dedicated funding mechanism to bridge the financial gap faced by local managers and deliver restoration on the scale required to support wild fish populations (See page 21).

SFCC's innovative approach creates an adaptive, transparent, and effective conservation framework. By harnessing the power of GIS technology, SFCC is not only supporting the improvement of conditions for Scotland's wild salmon but also setting a precedent for data-driven environmental management.

Local plans across 44 districts and a national dashboard of actions

SFCC Scottish Fisheries Coordination Centre

Crown Estate Scotland
Dìghreachd a' Chrùin Alba

Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba
gov.scot

Delivering training for freshwater research and conservation

It's vital to ensure that our members have the necessary skills to meet the challenges faced by our freshwater environment, and many of these skills are developed through the Scottish Fisheries Coordination Centre's training programmes.

One of the key courses delivered by the centre is electrofishing – a highly specialised technique which is often an essential tool when examining the health of salmonid populations. We continue to offer three courses across three venues each year, with a combined intake of around 50 candidates.

In recent years there has also been growing demand for freshwater pearl mussel survey training. After taking over the material from Iain Sime at NatureScot, this has been delivered by Chris Daphne from the Ness DSFB. Freshwater pearl mussels have a symbiotic life cycle with salmon and trout, and have become a key focus of restoration projects which also aim to improve conditions for fish. In 2025, we will work with NatureScot to ensure the training materials provide the skills expected by the licensing team. They will also contain an assessment component.

We also delivered our course in fish scale reading, which was bolstered this past year by the addition of the Marine Directorate's overview of their AI tool for reading salmon scale circuli. This tool is freely available but requires specialist setup, and the input from the directorate was invaluable.

Finally, we have an upcoming course being delivered by Buglife Scotland on the Extended Riverfly monitoring technique. This technique includes the production of scores for water quality and sedimentation, and will be a valuable tool for our members. It is a notable step up from the introduction to invertebrate surveying that we previously offered.

SFCC
Scottish Fisheries Coordination Centre

FMS and FVS hold fish health workshop

Understanding fish health is essential for conserving Scotland's wild fish populations, yet significant knowledge gaps remain.

To address this, Fisheries Management Scotland, in partnership with the Fish Veterinary Society (FVS), hosted a workshop in November at SRUC's Rural and Veterinary Innovation Centre, bringing together leading experts to tackle this challenge.

The workshop provided a foundational introduction to fish health, with a long-term goal of improving knowledge and understanding of the issues affecting Scotland's wild fish. Attendees included fisheries biologists, fish vets, the Fish Health Inspectorate, academics and researchers, fostering cross-sector collaboration. The event featured a keynote address from Scotland's Chief Veterinary Officer, Sheila Voas, and covered key topics such as fish anatomy and physiology, common diseases like Saprolegnia, freshwater parasites and practical techniques for sampling wild fish. Participants had the unique opportunity to perform necropsies and learn how to undertake a range of non-lethal samples, developing key skills for future health monitoring efforts.

Thanks to generous sponsorship from Crown Estate Scotland, the workshop was offered free to Fisheries Management Scotland members.

There isn't a clear understanding of the occurrence, extent or scale of disease and other health problems that could be affecting wild fish. Scotland's Wild Salmon Strategy identifies actions on fish disease, including the need to investigate research gaps and actions to prevent the introduction and spread of disease. We hope the workshop helped members consider new options for fish health monitoring programmes that can help us gain a better understanding of what might be happening to our salmon populations.

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

Sea lice regulatory framework

The first year of implementation for SEPA's sea lice regulatory framework marks a significant step toward managing the pressure aquaculture poses on Scotland's wild salmon and sea trout.

The framework is a spatially based and adaptive regulatory framework, underpinned by a risk assessment which will put focus on the highest-risk farms. Built on scientific risk assessments, the framework takes an evidence-led approach, with a coordinated monitoring programme guiding regulatory decisions.

A key focus throughout 2024 has been the development of a comprehensive monitoring programme to support the framework. To drive this forward, SEPA has established four dedicated steering groups, each with a specific role in ensuring effective implementation. The Coordination Group provides oversight and coordination of all monitoring work. The Sentinel Pen Group is responsible for designing and delivering a programme to validate the risk models used in the framework. The Juvenile Population Assessment Group focuses on tracking the status and trends of wild salmon and sea trout populations in marine aquaculture areas, while the Sea Trout Sea Lice Group investigates current levels and trends in sea lice infestations, specifically on wild sea trout. These groups will continue their work throughout 2025, with the full monitoring programme expected to be operational by 2026. This year, SEPA will also trial a sea trout sea lice monitoring programme at a similar scale to the Marine Directorate's previous sweep netting initiative.

As part of the framework, new permit conditions will take effect this spring, introducing stricter requirements for fish farms. All farms will be required to report both total fish numbers and sea lice counts, ensuring greater transparency in assessing potential risks to wild fish. For farms identified as posing a higher risk, additional measures will be introduced, including limits on adult female lice numbers during the sensitive smolt migration period.

> "Fisheries Management Scotland has been actively involved in the development of this framework, ensuring the concerns of wild fish interests are represented."
>
> Helen Feenan, Fisheries Management Scotland

While we commend the steps taken to improve regulation, the success of this framework will depend on robust implementation and enforcement, and adaptive management based on emerging evidence. FMS urges all stakeholders – including government agencies, researchers and local managers – to remain engaged and ensure that the framework delivers meaningful, long-term benefits for wild fish.

Photo: Richard Davies

Engaging with SEPA

In 2024, we launched a national engagement forum alongside SEPA, bringing together representatives from District Salmon Fishery Boards and Rivers and Fisheries Trusts.

This forum has become a valuable opportunity for considering key issues such as fish barrier removal, pollution reporting, forestry impacts and SEPA's enforcement strategies. It also allows for early collaboration on forthcoming initiatives, including the fourth cycle of River Basin Management Planning and upcoming work on water resource management.

Fisheries Management Scotland has played a key role in ensuring that our members' voices are heard in SEPA's efforts to identify and address barriers to fish migration. Through this process, local fishery managers have been able to highlight broader concerns, such as predation and poaching hotspots, ensuring these factors are considered in this prioritisation process.

Through the FMS Hydro Committee, we've worked closely with our members to gather crucial data supporting SEPA's review of large-scale hydroelectric projects. Our efforts have pinpointed several areas where updated licensing conditions could significantly benefit Scotland's wild salmon and sea trout populations.

As an active member of SEPA's water scarcity communications group, in April 2024 we also took part in a roundtable discussion – hosted by Jim Fairlie MSP and Lorna Slater MSP – focused on the growing challenges posed by both water scarcity and flooding.

We remain steadfast in our commitment to strong enforcement of environmental regulations across all sectors. Effective regulation is essential if we are to tackle the pressing climate and nature crises. the importance of SEPA's role is clear, with many key actions in Scotland's Wild Salmon Strategy relying on their leadership.

FMS calls for better protection of vital inshore marine habitat

Bob Younger

Fish Legal

The Scottish Wild Salmon Strategy 2022 took a significant step forward in attempting to identify the range of threats and pressures driving the declines of Atlantic salmon. Some of these are better understood than others. One less understood threat is the impact of inshore commercial fishing, which, the strategy states, "may have significant impacts on salmon growth and mortality".

The inshore is legally defined as the area 12 miles out from the baseline around Scotland and its islands, and it covers 62,000 km^2. Its shallow waters have traditionally supported complex habitats, important in the early life cycles of many varieties of fish, including keystone species such as herring.

Over the last 40 years, the ecology of the inshore has been significantly degraded by the impacts of bottom contact fisheries, particularly the nephrops (prawn) trawl fishery and the scallop dredge fisheries. There have been extensive losses of sensitive and fragile seabed habitats including seagrass and cold water corals such as maerl.

The interconnectedness of inshore marine food webs makes it likely that the declines in marine biodiversity are impacting salmon during the inshore part of their lifecycle. For example, we know that herring eggs were a widely available food source for young salmon while migrating from their natal rivers. The collapse of the herring stocks and the removal of this food source is likely to have had a direct negative impact upon salmon.

In 2024 I took a place on the Scottish Government's Fisheries Management and Conservation inshore sub-committee to represent the interests of FMS. Our aim is to not only ensure that the Marine Directorate is aware of our interests, but also to advocate for ecosystem-based management.

We would like to see a commitment from the Scottish Government to halt and reverse the chronic declines in the health of key inshore habitats to allow them to recover and to better support all marine life, including both salmon and sea trout.

Photo: Lauren Smith

Delivering the Wild Salmon Strategy

In response to the wild salmon crisis, the Scottish Government launched the Wild Salmon Strategy in 2022. The accompanying implementation plan outlines over 60 actions to be taken over five years. Here's how we're contributing to the successful delivery of this vital plan:

Improving the condition of rivers and ensuring salmon have free access to cold, clean water

FMS has facilitated a workstream through which our members are contributing to SEPA's identification and prioritisation of barrier removals, considering predation and poaching hotspots. The FMS Hydro Committee is contributing to SEPA's review of large-scale hydroelectric generation schemes.

FMS supported the development of a Scottish Angling Pathway Action Plan to help prevent the spread of invasive species and we are promoting biosecurity measures. We are working with partners to understand and manage the expected pink salmon invasion in 2025.

We continue to press for support to manage predation pressure from fish-eating birds and seals. FMS secured Marine Fund Scotland support to purchase and deploy acoustic deterrent devices to put seals off entering rivers.

FMS worked with Scottish Forestry to develop riparian woodland target area maps, leading to enhanced grant support for riverbank tree planting, providing shade to address rising water temperatures.

As a member of the Scottish Beaver Advisory Group, FMS is working to ensure that salmon are properly considered as part of decision-making on beaver management.

Members of FMS are supporting a PhD at the University of Aberdeen investigating the impact of Saprolegnia in Scottish rivers.

Managing exploitation through effective regulation, deterrents and enforcement

Fish poaching has one of the highest conviction rates among wildlife crimes, but it also has the lowest average fine levels. We are working to ensure that penalties are commensurate with those for other wildlife crimes. We work with IFM to provide ongoing training for water bailiffs and we deliver specialist training for Police Scotland and the Crown Office Procurator Fiscal Service to enhance understanding of fish-related crimes.

We led the development of updated guidance on best practice catch and release, to ensure that caught fish have the best possible chance of survival.

Understanding and mitigating pressures in the marine and coastal environment

FMS is working to ensure the implementation of the Salmon Interactions Working Group's recommendations, including SEPA's sea lice regulatory framework. FMS are actively contributing to workstreams on national marine planning, inshore fisheries management and offshore wind to safeguard wild salmon.

Making a positive contribution through international collaborations

Through the Missing Salmon Alliance, we helped to organise the 2025 Wild Salmon Connections Conference at Fishmongers' Hall in London, fostering international collaboration in salmon conservation. We actively participate in the NASCO NGO group to push for urgent action by member states (parties to NASCO).

Developing a modernised and fit-for-purpose policy framework

FMS has established a working group with the aim of providing recommendations to the Scottish Government for modernising freshwater fisheries management policies and developing sustainable funding for local fisheries management.

"It is now just over a year since we launched the Wild Salmon Strategy Implementation Plan and we remain as committed as ever to delivering on those actions. FMS and several representatives from Boards and Trusts sit on the delivery group because we recognise the important role they play in local management to mitigate the impact of pressures on salmon."

Mairi Gougeon, Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands, on the Wild Salmon Strategy at FMS Conference 2024

Develop and maintain strong partnerships

Restoring Scotland's river woodlands

Scotland's rivers weave through landscapes that have sustained people and wildlife for centuries. Yet, the decline of riverside woodlands – critical for maintaining water quality, biodiversity and climate resilience – has left many waterways exposed to rising temperatures, erosion and habitat degradation. Without intervention, the situation threatens species including wild Atlantic salmon and freshwater pearl mussels.

Riverwoods, a pioneering partnership launched in 2019, brings together environmental charities, rivers and fisheries trusts, statutory agencies, industry representatives and research institutes to restore vital ecosystems.

The Riverwoods Blueprint is a five-year, £2.9 million project, made possible by the National Lottery Heritage Fund and National Lottery players, and is at the heart of the wider Riverwoods initiative. It applies on-the-ground learnings to develop a practical, scalable model and route map for restoring Scotland's riverside woodlands, ensuring healthier rivers and more resilient ecosystems.

65% of Scotland's rivers have insufficient tree cover to protect them from climate-induced warming

The Riverwoods Blueprint Project will deliver:

Trees in the ground:
Over 100 hectares of planting in three areas that demonstrate strong collaborative efforts across the partnership and with communities in delivery. **Delivered by the Kyle of Sutherland Rivers Trust, Tweed Forum, and the Spey Catchment Initiative**

New funding mechanisms:
A new small grant scheme targeted specifically at supporting the development and design of river woodland creation, expansion and restoration projects.

Heightened collaboration:
A digital centre of excellence that serves as a space for knowledge and data sharing, best practice guidance, and centralised resources, including financial and advisory opportunities. **Workstream co-led by Fisheries Management Scotland**

Standardised measuring and monitoring:
A comprehensive framework of surveying and monitoring protocols to support the evaluation of riverwoods projects over time.

Advocacy
A strong and unified advocacy platform ensuring riparian woodland restoration remains a policy priority by engaging with decision-makers, landowners and the wider conservation sector. **Workstream co-led by Fisheries Management Scotland**

As Alan Wells, our Chief Executive, said: "By equipping land managers, practitioners, and communities with the tools to design, fund and deliver projects more effectively, we can help ensure the long-term health of our river ecosystems – critical for the survival of our native salmonids, including wild Atlantic salmon."

For more information about Riverwoods, visit **www.riverwoods.org.uk**

Wild Salmon Connections

Katherine Gillbe

Programme Manager,
Missing Salmon Alliance

In January 2025, the Missing Salmon Alliance and international partners held a flagship three-day conference, called Wild Salmon Connections, kindly hosted by Fishmongers' Company.

The goal was to ignite an urgent, renewed international focus on wild salmon, demonstrating their significance as a barometer for the health of our planet and showing that while they are in crisis, there is hope.

The three conference themes - Inspiring People, Environmental Leadership and Focusing for the Future – shared the idea that conserving wild salmon can only be achieved when they are considered in the context of their natural environment, economic value, and place in society and culture.

Over 250 attendees heard a diverse group of speakers discussing these themes and topics including catchment restoration success stories, the state of wild salmon today and the challenges of achieving free access to cold, clean water.

Our keynote speakers included leading economist, Professor Sir Dieter Helm, who focused on the importance of valuing wild salmon as part of our shared natural capital and President Fawn Sharp, Quinault Tribal member and former President of the National Congress of American Indians, who spoke of the profound importance of wild salmon to the cultural identity of Indigenous peoples.

We were also thrilled to be joined by three government ministers: Mairi Gougeon, Scottish Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands; Andreas Bjelland Eriksen, Norwegian Minister of Climate and Environment; and Daniel Zeichner, UK Minister of State at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. Each acknowledged the political salience of the threat to wild salmon and the urgency with which it needs to be addressed.

At the close of the conference, the Missing Salmon Alliance launched the Wild Salmon Connections Declaration, calling for urgent action to restore wild salmon. We urge all individuals, policymakers and organisations with the power to effect change to sign the declaration and pledge to take strong and bold action to protect wild salmon and the ecosystems they depend on.

Sign the Declaration

With wild salmon classified as 'endangered' in the UK and 'near threatened' globally in 2023, it's clear – as the children from the Thames Salmon School said – it is up to us to save the salmon.

There is hope but we must all commit to bold action, and it must start now.

Photo: Missing Salmon Alliance

THE MISSING SALMON ALLIANCE

WILD SALMON Connections
Inspiring Solutions

The Scottish Invasive Species Initiative

Callum Sinclair

Project Manager

Since 2018, the Scottish Invasive Species Initiative (SISI) has controlled a suite of invasive non-native plants (giant hogweed, Japanese knotweed, Himalayan balsam and American skunk cabbage), as well as the American mink, across approximately a third of mainland Scotland. The partnership is led by NatureScot, but practical work is delivered by 11 Fisheries Management Scotland members – from Tayside in the south, to Sutherland in the north and all parts in between. Covering 29,500 km^2, the project delivers the largest invasive non-native species control programme in the British Isles.

The initiative works systematically to tackle invasive plants across catchments where they occur. Identifying the source(s) of each plant infestation in each catchment means control takes place systematically and logically, working from the top of catchments to the sea. The scale of infestation in some rivers means that whole catchment control is sometimes not yet in place – but it is coming. Scattering control randomly in catchments simply will not work if we want to solve invasive species problems.

Similarly, American mink control is an annual challenge. Removing mink prior to breeding in spring is critical – as are follow-up captures after the breeding season, as the young disperse in late summer.

Central to success is the coordination provided by staff, the comprehensive geographic coverage provided by rivers trusts and boards and – crucially – the engagement of hundreds of volunteers to the cause. Since 2018, these remarkable plant and mink volunteers have provided >156,000 hours (equivalent to 106 full time staff for a year) to the programme – a scale of effort simply not affordable without their voluntary dedication and commitment. Our native wildlife and ecology benefit as a result.

For further information or to get involved visit **www.invasivespecies.scot**

Build capacity and resilience within our membership

Nature finance

Fisheries Management Scotland (FMS) is actively shaping Scotland's nature finance landscape to support our members. Our dedicated team focuses on policy engagement, funding development and sector-wide knowledge sharing. We are also helping to develop standards and metrics to ensure river restoration is prioritised in natural capital investment.

Scottish Rivers Fund

Scotland's rivers are vital ecosystems, supporting biodiversity, local communities and the wider economy. However, decades of environmental pressures have degraded them, and traditional funding sources are not sufficient to deliver the scale of restoration needed. At FMS we are making significant strides towards developing a Scottish Rivers Fund designed to unlock corporate finance to support river catchment restoration across Scotland. We aim to help projects which deliver measurable and meaningful outcomes for both nature and people.

The Scottish Rivers Fund is being developed in phases, aligning corporate environmental, social and governance (ESG) priorities with river restoration needs, to establish a long-term funding model for our river catchments.

Phase 1: Understanding investor demand (Oct 2023 – Mar 2024)	**Phase 2:** Investment-ready projects (May 2024 – Mar 2025)	**Phase 3:** Scaling up investment (future phase and development)
Explored fund structures and governance models for sustainable investment. Evaluated investor appetite for river restoration financing.	Identified investment-ready projects with local fisheries and river managers. Established a monitoring framework and community engagement strategy to measure benefits.	Securing the fund hosting governance and management. Marketing the fund to secure contributions and long-term investment.

As demand for nature-based solutions grows, the fund will serve as an accessible vehicle to unlock the finance needed to restore and protect Scotland's river catchments for generations to come.

Biodiversity net gain

FMS recently hosted a biodiversity net gain (BNG) awareness event to support members wishing to access Scottish Power Energy Networks' (SPEN) BNG funding – designed to offset the ecological footprint of transmission line infrastructure. Several FMS members in southern Scotland have already submitted proposals for river catchment restoration under this fund. With Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks (SSEN) already implementing a robust BNG framework in northern Scotland, we will expand national-scale training and ensure that FMS members can fully capitalise on this emerging financing avenue.

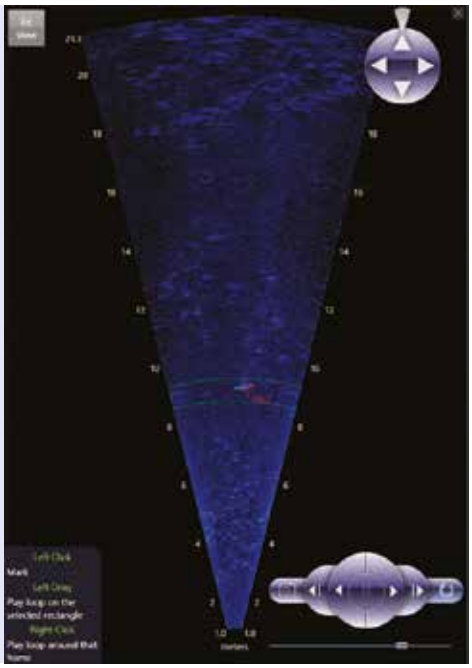
We are especially grateful to the FIRNS programme[1], Rivers Trust, Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, the Missing Salmon Alliance and the Golden Bottle Trust, who have provided vital support to enable our work in nature finance to progress.

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

National projects to support Scotland's wild fish and freshwater ecosystems

Using machine learning for fish counting

There are a variety of fish counter types in use at the moment – resistivity, video and sonar counters are the main types used in Scotland. Counters with a continuous video feed are advantageous as these allow verification of other signals such as resistivity. However, there is a considerable challenge in terms of the processing time. It requires a staff member to manually review all the footage, which is a considerable constraint on resources. To improve this issue, we have two projects to use machine learning techniques to aid in the process of reviewing video and sonar footage. These projects should be complete by the end of March, and will significantly reduce the time needed to review footage. We aim to make these tools available to all FMS members, and this may facilitate future installations of new fish counters.



Adult salmon sampling

Sampling of individual adult salmon is used to collect information on the size, sex and age of the fish. This information feeds directly into the stock assessments used for national and international management of Scottish salmon. Sampling of individuals can also provide information on their condition, while examination of scale samples allows their growth history to be investigated.

In Scotland, and other countries, scale samples were historically collected from commercial net fisheries but most of these fisheries are now closed. To fill this data gap a National Adult Sampling programme was developed by the Marine Directorate, with data collection undertaken by FMS members. This data has been collected for the past four years and feeds directly into the Scottish Government salmon conservation measures.

Sweep netting

The Marine Directorate have funded a programme of wild fish post-smolt sweep netting and coastal fyke netting surveys across the west coast of Scotland. This work occurs annually and helps facilitate ongoing engagement with aquaculture stakeholders regarding interactions between aquaculture and wild salmonid fish.

Photo: Richard Davies

Catch and release best practice guidance

In February 2025, in line with the opening of the fishing season on many rivers, Fisheries Management Scotland, in collaboration with partners, released updated catch and release best practice guidance to support the conservation of wild Atlantic salmon. This initiative aligns with the objectives of the Wild Salmon Strategy, aiming to provide anglers with practical advice to maximise the survival of released salmon.

Since 1994, Scotland has seen a significant increase in the release of rod-caught salmon, with current rates exceeding 95%, positioning Scottish anglers as global leaders in responsible angling practices. However, recent studies indicate that salmon survival rates can be further improved by addressing key stress factors during catch and release.

The updated guidance highlights four simple but effective principles:

KEEP IT COOL: Salmon struggle in warmer water; fish on cooler days or early mornings to reduce stress.

KEEP HANDS OFF: Wherever possible, avoid handling fish directly to prevent infection.

KEEP IT UNDER: Fish have a better chance of survival when they stay submerged throughout the release.

KEEP IT CLEAN: Always check, clean and dry your gear to prevent spreading disease, parasites and invasive species

By adopting best practice, anglers can achieve near 100% survival rates for released salmon, ensuring that these iconic fish have the best possible chance to spawn and sustain future generations.

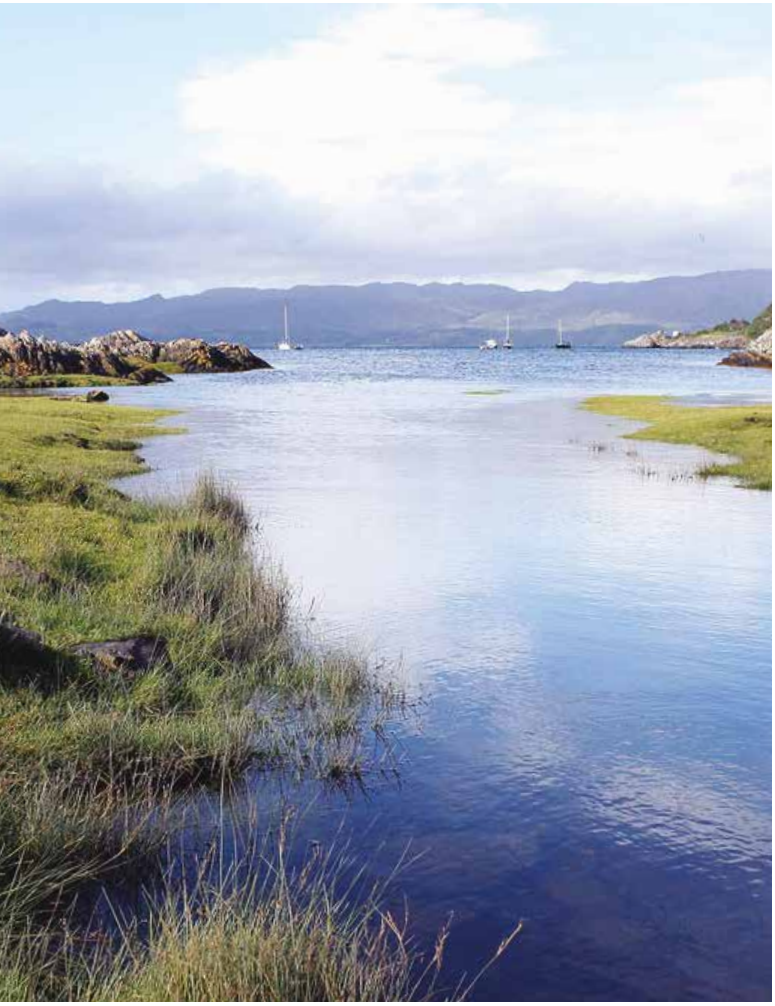
For more detailed information and to access the full guidance, please visit www.fms.scot/catchandrelease

Read more:

Build capacity and resilience in Fisheries Management Scotland

Strengthening our capacity for conservation

This year marked a significant milestone for FMS – our team grew to eight, reflecting our growing reputation as a national delivery organisation and our commitment to support our members' efforts to protect and restore our river catchments.



We have increased our capacity in the last year, with the purpose of delivering tangible benefits to Scotland's rivers and to support national and local conservation efforts. With additional expertise and resources, we can now provide more direct support to our members, continue to press the case for conservation and restoration of our rivers, and expand funding opportunities to support sustainable fisheries management and river restoration initiatives.

This would not be possible without the dedicated support of our funders. In past years, we were fortunate to bring on Paul Sizeland and Jenny McNeill through generous funding from Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and the Missing Salmon Alliance. This year, we extend our sincere gratitude to Crown Estate Scotland and The Facility for Investment Ready Nature in Scotland (FIRNS) – delivered by NatureScot in collaboration with the Scottish Government and in partnership with the National Lottery Heritage Fund – who have enabled us to establish three key new roles:

Chloe Grant

Wild Salmon Conservation Manager

With Crown Estate Scotland's funding, Chloe helps to deliver Scotland's Wild Salmon Strategy, ensuring that wild salmon are prioritised in national policy discussions and that key conservation actions are achieved.

Helen Feenan

Aquaculture Interactions Manager

Crown Estate Scotland's funding has also been instrumental in continuing our Aquaculture Interactions Manager's role. While this role has been in place for five years, Helen joined FMS in January 2024, bringing fresh perspectives and a renewed focus on improving industry engagement, sharing learnings between the wild and farmed fish sectors, and ensuring that regulation properly protects wild fish.

Leah Reinfranck

Nature Finance Project Officer

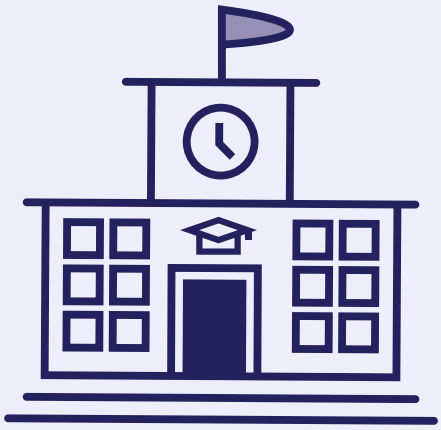
With funding from NatureScot and the National Lottery Heritage Fund, via FIRNS, Leah is contributing to the development of the Scottish Rivers Fund – an ambitious project designed to unlock the vital corporate investment needed to restore healthy, resilient river catchments across Scotland for both nature and people.

On behalf of our team, we extend our sincere thanks to our funders for their commitment to conservation and their belief in our mission. Together, we are making a real difference in ensuring a future where wild salmon can thrive in Scotland's rivers.

Our members' impact

206,595

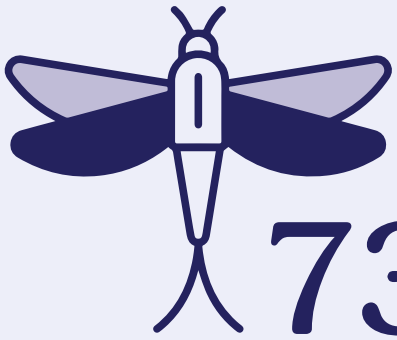
Native trees to help protect fish habitat planted by our members



Worked with 197 schools and reached out to 9,820 number of pupils to educate them about fish

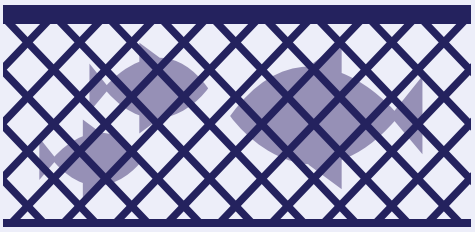
1,142

Volunteers engaged across Scotland



732

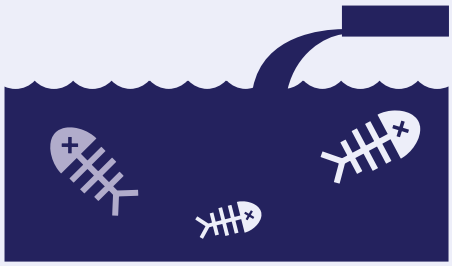
Sites surveyed for invertebrate populations



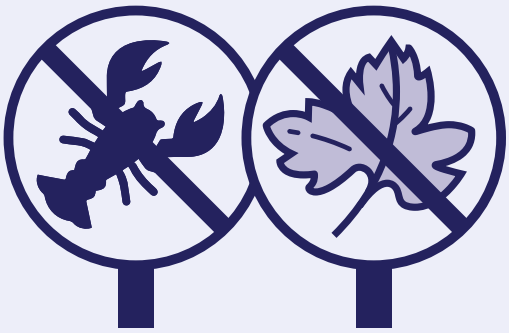
508

Fish poaching incidents recorded and **55** illegal instruments seized

124



Pollution incidents and other infringements were reported to SEPA

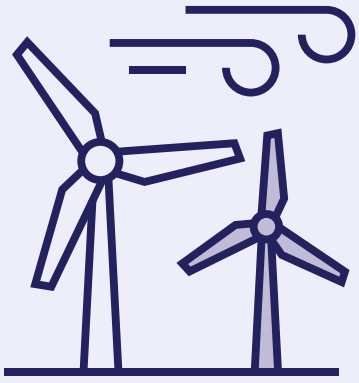


1,238km

Of riverbank invasive species managed by our members

2,765

Sites surveyed for juvenile fish populations



Our members responded to 354 local developments to help protect wild fish. These include developments such as fish farms, wind farms, hydropower and many other local proposals

354

Pioneering weir removal on the Border Esk

Struan Candlish

Ayrshire Rivers Trust

In 2024, we undertook a groundbreaking project to remove Davington Weir on the Border Esk catchment in Dumfries and Galloway. The funding for this project was from the Water Environment Fund and we won the tender issued by the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA). The weir, a barrier in place for over a century, had long obstructed the natural migration of salmon, trout, and eels, cutting them off from 5 km of prime habitat. By removing the structure, we have reopened critical spawning and feeding grounds for these species and allowed the watercourse to return to its natural flow regime and sediment transport conditions.

Unlike conventional demolition methods, we used a technique never before applied in Scotland – non-explosive demolition grout. This method involved drilling precise holes into the concrete structure and filling them with an expanding grout. As the grout expanded, it fractured the concrete away from the underlying bedrock, allowing for careful removal and recycling offsite. The benefit of this technique is that there is little requirement for work with heavy machinery.

Given the proximity of the site to the British Geological Survey (BGS) geophysical telemetry stations, a low impact methodology was required. Traditional demolition could have compromised the integrity of these monitoring stations, so our low-impact method was the perfect solution.

Timing was critical. To avoid disrupting fish spawning, the project had to be completed before the peak breeding season of 2024. Initially, we were concerned that weather and fluctuating water levels might delay progress, but a fortunate stretch of dry conditions created the perfect window for completion. ART, SEPA, and BGS collaborated closely to streamline project delivery, overcoming logistical challenges with minimal disruption.

We learned a great deal from this project and have similar barriers in Ayrshire where we plan to use this technique. Following the completion of the project there has been some interest from other organisations in the method and possible applications. We are very happy to help anyone, just get in touch.

Restoring life to a highland river's upper reaches

Sunny Bradbury

Cromarty Firth
Fishery Board

The Balnagowan is a small but highly productive river in the Cromarty Firth watershed. The river remains heavily wooded on both banks along much of its course and this contributes to its productivity, providing excellent feeding grounds and habitat for fish communities throughout the lower and middle reaches. Resident brown trout are abundant, extending up to the headwater streams, and the river traditionally supported a very strong run of sea trout.

However, in recent years, it has become evident that the primary pressure facing the river's anadromous fish, including Atlantic salmon, is the prevalence of man-made barriers, many of which are now entirely redundant. One such barrier is the Marybank weir, which was originally built to divert water to a salmon hatchery on Balnagown Estate. For decades, its long concrete apron and inefficient fish pass made migration difficult, limiting access to crucial spawning grounds. While fish could occasionally ascend during high flows, passage was inconsistent and dependent on precise river conditions.

As a result, the Cromarty Firth Fishery Board applied for funding from the Open Rivers Programme in winter 2023 and successfully secured full funding to cover removal of the weir. By mid-September 2024, work was underway, and within a month, the weir was gone – restoring the natural sediment and flow regimes for the first time in generations. The impact was almost immediate. Within minutes of removing the last silt traps and heavy machinery, a sea trout was seen navigating the newly opened stretch of river. In the coming year the fishery board will continue to monitor the river channel to ensure it stabilises in as natural a way as possible. Early indications suggest that some excellent juvenile habitat has been uncovered, with runs and riffles now present where there was previously a slow, deep pool unsuitable for juvenile salmonids. Electrofishing surveys will commence in the summer and hopefully complete the story.

By allowing nature to reclaim its course, the Balnagowan River is once again a lifeline for migratory fish, reinforcing that the removal of outdated barriers can support Scotland's rich freshwater ecosystems.

We would like to thank Balnagowan Estate for their support in this project and The Open Rivers Programme for funding the works. The project would not have been possible without excellent advice and support from both SEPA and CBEC eco engineering.

OPEN RIVERS PROGRAMME

Reflections of a water bailiff

Richard Whyte

Head Water Bailiff,
Spey Fishery Board

Standing on the banks of the River Spey, watching its waters carve their way to the sea, I feel incredibly lucky. For nearly three decades, this river has been my workplace, my responsibility and my home. Few people spend their career doing what they love – but I have, and I'm grateful.

I became a water bailiff at 18, but my connection to the Spey runs deeper. My father was a ghillie at Gordon Castle for 30 years, and I grew up on the riverbank, surrounded by men whose lives revolved around fishing and gamekeeping. My family were salmon netsmen and wooden boat builders – my superheroes. From an early age, I knew I wanted to follow in their footsteps.

The job has never been easy. It's often secretive and solitary, and demands patience, vigilance and diplomacy. Protecting salmon stocks isn't just about catching poachers but also about working with proprietors, ghillies and anglers to ensure the river's future.

Much has changed since I started. Back then, mobile phones weren't a thing, and everything was face-to-face. Now, social media can expose an incident in minutes, and technology plays a huge role in fisheries management. Some changes are positive – better conservation awareness, instant communication – but I miss the old ways, when knowledge was passed down on the river.

I've seen salmon numbers decline, and it's heartbreaking, but I refuse to be pessimistic. Conservation efforts, habitat restoration and passionate people still give me hope.

Looking ahead, I feel the pull to connect with the river differently. My years as a bailiff have been about protection, but perhaps my future lies in sharing – passing on my knowledge and passion as a ghillie. Whatever comes next, I know one thing: I've been incredibly fortunate to spend my life on this river.

The importance of fisheries to the local economy

Claire Mercer-Nairne

Vice-Convener,
Tay District Salmon Fishery Board

In recent years, several studies have attempted to quantify the economic value of salmon fishing in Scotland. The most recent Scotland-wide economic impact assessment of wild fisheries indicates around £135m of angler expenditure, 4,300 full-time equivalent jobs and £79.9m gross value added (GVA) in 2014. The Wild Salmon Strategy now includes a commitment to analyse not just the financial impact but also the environmental and socio-economic benefits of healthy wild salmon populations – recognising their intrinsic value. While we look forward to the results of this latest study, I want to share a personal perspective as a hotelier in rural Tayside.

In Scotland, the return of the iconic spring salmon is more than just a natural spectacle – it's an economic lifeline. During the early months of the year, when tourism is otherwise scarce, salmon fishing sustains entire rural communities. In Tayside, for example, spring salmon fishing ensures year-round employment for accommodation, food, and tourism providers. The steady weekday business from January to May allows our medium-sized hotel to remain open year-round, supporting over 40 permanent jobs and creating additional part-time roles for local students. We also provide business for local producers, tradespeople, and suppliers. Without spring salmon fishing, we would be forced into a seasonal model, closing for three months – a reality that has already hit several hotels on west coast rivers.

> "For many young people in rural areas, finding year-round work is a challenge. Salmon fishing brings economic opportunities which allow me to stay in my community. I work for a busy hotel near prime salmon beats, I am also studying to be an accountant. My grandfather was a head ghillie and I love being able to live close to him. If we lose this tradition, we risk losing the next generation of rural workers and residents."
>
> Grace M, Guildtown, Perth & Kinross

The ripple effect of this shift would be profound. Rural jobs would disappear, and the housing market would suffer, with family homes repurposed for seasonal worker accommodation. This isn't just about the economy – it's about the survival of rural communities. Nature doesn't thrive in isolation; it needs stewardship. Ghillies and gamekeepers are the backbone of the countryside, ensuring that schools, shops, and services remain viable, in turn supporting both tourism and local workers.

Scotland has an international reputation for salmon fishing, drawing in international visitors who come for the wild beauty of our rivers. Losing this tradition would be losing a vital part of our national identity. The question is – will we take the necessary action to safeguard it?

Loch Lomond Fisheries Trust: creating a thriving catchment

Jen Keeping & Beth Watson

Loch Lomond Fisheries Trust

The Loch Lomond Fisheries Trust (LLFT) has undergone several changes over the past year. In 2024, we bid farewell to Nick Beevers and Jay Malpas, and our new team has since taken shape – with Jen Keeping as interim manager/ biologist and Beth Watson as biologist.

We may be a small team but we have big plans for the Loch Lomond catchment in 2025. Like many trusts, LLFT is committed to balancing ongoing wildlife monitoring – including electrofishing, beaver monitoring and redd surveys – with conservation efforts and community outreach. Following an oil spill in January 2024, the River Fruin on the west side of the catchment needs some extra care, with plans for some habitat restoration, including a barrier removal project using baffles to open up more habitat for salmonids. Meanwhile, on the east side, we'll continue working with the National Park to control invasive non-native species, and with NatureScot to monitor beaver expansion. Additionally, we are continuing outreach with local volunteers through Riverfly surveys, expanding them to include more sites.

What's new?

We are looking forward to a collaboration with SCENE to facilitate studies on the lamprey populations in the Endrick, which is classified as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) for this species. We're also adding water quality monitoring to our survey season across the catchment, to help identify areas of poor habitat quality and target ongoing restoration efforts.

We're looking forward to making meaningful progress in 2025 – stay tuned!

Monitoring spring-spawning herring in Wester Ross

Peter Cunningham

Wester Ross Fisheries Trust

Until the 1970s, herring were a cornerstone of Scotland's coastal economy, generating both livelihoods and sustenance. As a keystone species, they also played a crucial role in marine ecosystems, providing vital food for many other animals.

Herring spawn on the seabed, with their eggs taking around three weeks to hatch. After hatching, tiny herring larvae drift in the plankton.

In March 2019, spawning herring were recorded near Loch Gairloch by the late Andy Jackson, supported by Wester Ross Fisheries Trust. Andy's films were shown on BBC Blue Planet UK and Springwatch.

Fast forward to 2024, with support from the West of Scotland Herring Hunt (WOSHH), signs of approaching herring shoals were seen from late February to the northwest of Gairloch. At least 100 gannets were seen, together with unusually large pods of porpoises (80+), a pod of orca and a minke whale. On 10th March, an unusual patch of turquoise water – visible from both the shore and satellite images – suggested active spawning.

To confirm that spawning had taken place, drop-down cameras were deployed on 12th March. Layers of herring eggs were found on top of maerly gravel ridges at many locations within an area extending 3km from north to south and several hundred metres from east to west.

Despite these findings, much remains unknown about spring-spawning herring and their ecological importance. How crucial is an abundance of herring fry to the survival of post-smolt salmon as they migrate through coastal waters?

The summer of 2024 also saw regular sightings of humpback and fin whales in the Minch. Some humpbacks were observed feeding on krill – but were they also preying on juvenile and adult herring? At the time of writing (February 2025) one of the humpback whales has been in the news after being freed from an entanglement. As spawning time approaches, it will be interesting to see if these humpback whales follow the herring shoals, as they do in Norway.

Read more:

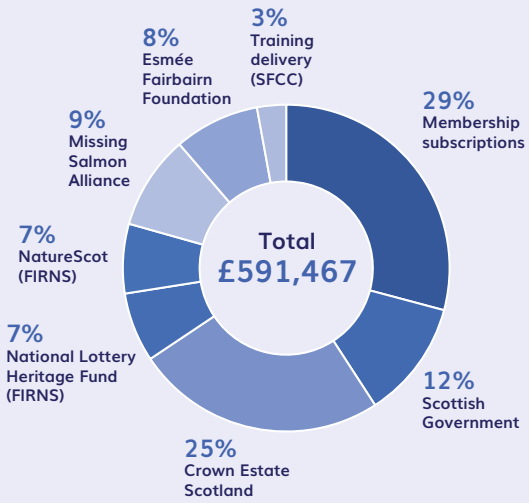
Our funding

Our work at Fisheries Management Scotland is made possible by the support of our members – Scotland's District Salmon Fishery Boards, the River Tweed Commission, and Rivers and Fisheries Trusts – who provide the core funding for our activities. In addition, we receive grant funding for specific projects from the Scottish Government, Marine Fund Scotland, Crown Estate Scotland, NatureScot and the National Heritage Lottery 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 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 freshwater fish and the ecosystems they depend on. In 2024/25, approximately £400,000 in grant funding was secured to support local management or distributed directly to our members to support their vital work.

The majority of our expenditure covers our dedicated team, who work relentlessly to advocate for Scotland's iconic migratory and freshwater fish and the health of our rivers and lochs. Full details can be found in our latest accounts at **www.fms.scot**

(The financial graphic on this page is provisional, pending approval of our 2024-25 annual accounts.)



Funding received in 2024/25

Aquaculture and wild fish interactions
(Crown Estate Scotland)

Wild Salmon Conservation Manager
(Crown Estate Scotland)

Scottish Fisheries Coordination Centre
(Marine Directorate)

Nature Finance project
(Heritage Lottery Fund & NatureScot, Esmée Fairbairn Foundation (via The Rivers Trust) and Missing Salmon Alliance)

Salmon Interactions – sea lice monitoring programme
(Marine Directorate - distributed to members)

National Adult Salmon Sampling Project
(Marine Directorate - distributed to members)

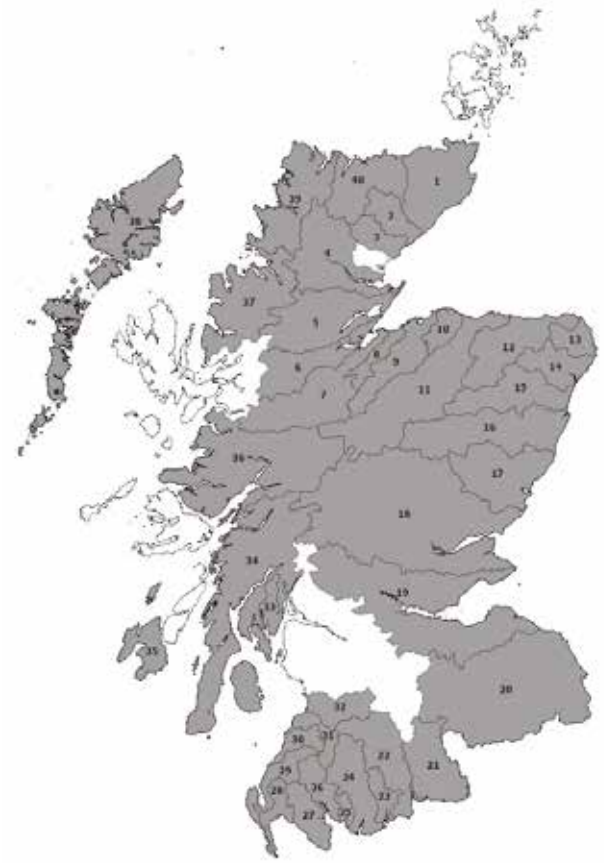
National Biosecurity Project
(Marine Fund Scotland – resources and equipment distributed to members)

Sonar AI Fish Counting
(Marine Fund Scotland – supporting local management)

Video AI Fish Counting
(Marine Fund Scotland – supporting local management)

District Salmon Fishery Boards

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

Rivers and Fisheries Trusts

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

Find out more on our apps page
https:/ /fms.scot/fish-reporting-apps-2/

Fisheries Management Scotland Directors

Richard Davies - Outer Hebrides
Guy Harris - Findhorn
Lorraine Hawkins - Dee (to 13th November 2024)
Amelia Heath - Forth
Edward Humphrey - Dee
David Johnstone - Annan
Alasdair Laing - Findhorn (to 13th November 2024)
Peter Landale - Nith (to 13th November 2024)
Lorna Lyle - Northern
Alexa MacAuslan - Northern (to 13th November 2024)
Claire Mercer-Nairne - Tay
Richard Miller - Deveron
Jamie Ribbens - Galloway
Richard Sankey - Kyle of Sutherland (Chair)
Melanie Smith - Skye and Lochalsh (to 13th November 2024)
Sandy Scott - Spey
Jamie Stewart - Tweed
Robert Younger - Argyll

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Fisheries Management Scotland is grateful to the following organisations for their valuable support.

Fisheries Management Scotland

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