

BRAITHREACHT NA COIRIBE

(BROTHERHOOD OF THE CORRIB)

Founded 1953

Hurney's Hut
Hurneys Point
Built 1953

Annaghdown Hut
The Narrows
Built 1958

Founders' Hut
Fly Island
Built 1993

Secretary:

Nial Collins
31 Fana Bui
Ballymoneen Rd
Galway

Policy Review
Inland Fisheries Ireland
Sunnyside House
Macroom
Co. Cork



28/11/2016

Re: Public Consultation – Pike Management in Brown Trout Fisheries

The Braithreacht na Coiribe angling club was founded in 1953 and has a membership base of 152. Since its inception the club has played a significant role in the development and conservation of Lough Corrib as a wild salmonid fishery, in particular to the area known as the 'Lower Lake' (area south of the narrows). The club has invested heavily in the development of mooring facilities in Pordarragh, Moycullen and the construction of three angling huts, two of which are open access. Furthermore, since its inception the club has invested significant funds in the development of the Oughterard hatchery for the supply of trout fry, the development of streams and the management of pike. The focus of the club's activities to date have been critical to developing and maintaining Lough Corrib as a salmonid fishery, which is now recognised internationally as a unique World Class salmonid fishery. Considering this, it is clear that the Braithreacht na Coiribe is a significant Lough Corrib stakeholder and the club, its members and its local community want IFI to:

- **Cease the implementation of the pike bye-law 809, 2006 on Lough Corrib and its associated rivers**
- **Continue to manage and remove pike of all sizes through gill netting, electrofishing and other appropriate means**
- **Allow angling clubs to remove pike of all sizes during club competitions with no bag limit. The control of the pike population through gill netting and electrofishing are effective techniques in their own rights. However, angling as a method for predator control was critical and efficient for selectively removing pike from areas around nursery streams during sensitive migration periods**

Although the club acknowledges the requirement for pike conservation bye laws in other fisheries, the current bye law protecting pike is far too general in its application nationally and does not fully take into account the specific requirements wild salmonid fisheries have for predator control management. It has however, long been acknowledged by leading experts, that a mixed wild fishery is not attainable to support a salmonid fishery such as Lough Corrib's.

Club angling records demonstrate that prior to the implementation of pike management policies on Lough Corrib, Lough Corrib's Lower Lake was effectively overrun by pike. Since 1954, the club holds an Annual Mixed Grill (trout, pike & perch) on the last Sunday of April and the recorded catches showed that the average total numbers of trout caught was between 7-12% of the total catch, with the majority of the catch comprising of pike (85-90%) prior to or at the initial phases of pike management activities. Records in the late 90's and 00's demonstrate that the average landings of trout are between 50-60% of total numbers caught in the same competition held on the last Sunday of April each year, proving further that pike management with habitat enhancement activities has a significant impact on the development of a healthy trout fishery. An interesting observation from the records maintained for this competition by the club is the year (1991) following the rod license where 286 Pike (total weight 1,052 lbs) and 25 trout (total weight) were caught. During the rod license period along with angling, pike management activities had ceased and this data clearly demonstrates that an unmanaged pike population very quickly leads to the lower Lough Corrib being completely dominated by pike.

In many ways this observation substantiates the conclusion made by O'Grady (1996) where he estimated that an unmanaged pike population would account annually for approximately 255,000 trout of 30-35cm, significantly impacting the survival rate of trout within the fishery.

In order to obtain an independent opinion, the club has taken the opportunity to consult with a number of internationally regarded scientists in fisheries modelling on the data presented in 2012 from the latest Lough Corrib survey. Although the presentation of the Corrib data is lacking detail in relation to the spatial differences between the lower and upper lake CPUEs and length distributions, it was noted that there is clearly a large decrease in pike in the 26-66cm length classes, however an increase in larger pike numbers was observed.

In relation to trout, it was observed that the 1996 data displaying the size frequencies of brown trout represents a healthy population structure. However, when comparing the 1996 data to the 2012 length frequency data on trout the big difference in the trout numbers comes from the lower number of individuals in the 22-42cm length classes. 22-42cm fish are approximately age 3 and 4-year-old and these year classes are lower than the older year classes, which demonstrates a change in < age 4 survival from 2008/2009 onwards.

Considering that habitat enhancement projects and practices were maintained during this period at the same level prior to 1996, serious consideration must be given to relationship between the introduction of the conservation pike bye laws in 2005, which

were subsequently amended in 2006, and the decline in survival of trout in 22-42cm size bracket. The pike bye law effectively ceased the cropping of pike and the removal of pike >85cm during culling and angling competitions.

Furthermore, large pike have been shown to congregate in or around the mouth of specific streams and rivers around Lough Corrib, for example the river Clare, where pike specifically target salmonid species migrating to and from these nursery streams. This predatory behavior is responsible for a significant percentage of salmonid mortality and adversely effects the recruitment of juvenile fish to the fishery. It is the clubs view that the current fisheries data indicate that larger pike are now having a significant impact on the survival of brown trout in Lough Corrib.

Lough Corrib is a Special Area of Conservation and holds unique strains of both salmon and trout. Indeed, unlike the genetic diversity of our salmonid species in Lough Corrib, there is no requirement to implement such stringent bye laws on Lough Corrib pike. A key finding of a recent genetic study on pike using microsatellite markers to investigate population structure from 15 Irish locations and a few European locations (Pedreschi et al. 2014) demonstrated a low level of genetic diversity amongst Irish and European pike indicating postglacial introduction to Irish waters. It is a well-known scientific fact that when two fish populations have been isolated long enough like the salmonids in Lough Corrib, genetic drift will lead to significant allele frequencies differences which can be easily detected.

Although the study by Pedreschi concludes that levels of genetic differentiation and diversity are high enough to argue for a 2 wave colonization pattern of Ireland, with the first wave possibly being natural and non-man-mediated. It is well recognised that this conclusion that pike naturally colonised Irish waters is far-fetched and more likely incorrect. Furthermore, the experimental design would require significant optimisation for this conclusion to be substantiated, in particular the genetic markers (microsats) used by Pedreschi et al. (2014) are more suitable for population differentiation at a relatively recent time scale, but are not best to test historical demographic events.

The authors themselves highlight that decreasing levels of genetic diversity were observed in Irish pike and indeed the population as a whole is considered to be genetically homogenous. Regardless of the evidence which is pointing to a recent man mediated introduction, it is however clear that there is no requirement to implement stringent bye-laws on a fish species with significant fecundity rates that is neither genetically unique or endangered.

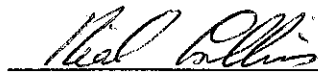
Lough Corrib, with the consolidated efforts of IFI and the Lough Corrib based clubs, is currently positioned as a well-established wild brown trout tourist angling destination which in turn has played a significant role to the region's economic development. In recognition of this, Lough Corrib continues to be listed as one of 3 lakes in Ireland worth visiting to fish for brown trout in 2017 (Trout & Salmon, November 2016). Indeed, it is important to note that no fishery not practicing predator control in Ireland was listed as a trout fishery to visit in 2017.

There are significant concerns by the club that more stringent conservation measures for pike will be implemented which will significantly jeopardies the future of the club, its investments to date and the quality of the fishery's unique offering. The club also

has significant concerns about the process used to date by IFI to engage with the relevant stakeholders of Lough Corrib to inform current and future management strategies of the lake. It also has significant concerns about the current ESRI study to drive a pro-pike agenda by designing a questionnaire to create a scenario of 'either or' for pike and African pond weed management.

It is the club's view that IFI and Tourism Ireland should consider that Ireland's angling offering should be split into two areas, the provision of high quality coarse fisheries and the provision of high quality salmonid fisheries. However, in order to support and maintain lough Corrib as a World Class brown trout fishery pike management must be continued. The club does appreciate the complexity of the issue, but whether it is the management of a game shoot or a wild trout fishery predator control is a necessity and not a luxury.

Sincerely



Sec. Braithreacht na Coiribe