



Camillaun Lodge and Angling Centre
Eighterard
Oughterard
Co. Galway

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Submission to Inland Fisheries Ireland on Wild Brown Trout and Pike Management.

I run an angling guesthouse on Lough Corrib – Camillaun Lodge and Angling Centre and have done so since 1992. The lodge is small and employs a staff of three. The Lodge is a founder member of the Great Fishing Houses of Ireland a collection of angling establishments located in the rivers and lakes in Ireland with the best game fishing.

My principal fishing clients are trout anglers who return with incredible loyalty annually to enjoy the sport of trout fishing mainly by fly but also by dapping and trolling. I also have casual anglers who come and participate in angling as an activity to undertake during their stay in Ireland, these are less particular about what they catch – anything is a bonus. The added benefit for them of having their own fish for dinner is a big bonus. There are few places remaining in Europe where you can catch wild trout of the quality of the trout in these lakes and know you are probably the first person to touch the fish.

We support and encourage catch and release but we know many tourists would love to have a fish to eat. Many of the local community also appreciate the trout as a wonderful resource which needs to be cherished and protected but with the view to fish for it and eat it in a sustainable way

Recommendation 1:

- Encourage catch and release for wild brown trout but still permit up to, say 3 fish per day, to be retained – preferable smaller fish even less than the current size limit, and leave the larger ones to spawn.

There are a small number of unique limestone lakes in Ireland where the ecology is absolutely unique in terms of productivity in these lakes and in which wild brown trout can flourish. For over 60 years the Inland Fisheries Trust and later the Central and Regional Fisheries Boards identified the importance of these lakes in terms of the brown trout fisheries, they supported and put in place a management regime that ensured trout stocks were maximised over the competing top predator pike.

Since the late 1950's early 1960's a clear policy was adopted that was robustly promoted and defended by the state agencies. The key areas of research identified the significance of the predation on trout by pike. As a consequence the management measures were introduced which prioritised the reduction in pike in the key Great Lakes. This management regime resulted in Lough Corrib becoming renowned as one of the top wild brown trout fisheries in Europe and is envied by trout anglers from the UK where virtually all their original wild brown trout fisheries are gone and they now rely on stocked fisheries which are a completely inferior product. In fact in terms of productive lakes in the UK the only similar lake to the Irish lakes is Lough Leven in Scotland. In Ireland however we have the following premier wild brown trout fisheries – including the Great Western lakes: Loughs Corrib, Mask, Carra, Conn, Cullen, Arrow, Ennell, Sheelin and Derravaragh and to a lesser extent Lough Owel which can grow fish but does not have the necessary spawning habitat.

The Great Western lakes were branded by Bord Failte and the Central Fisheries Boards in the 1980's and they were promoted as wild brown trout fisheries. This was accepted as all the scientific evidence to date has clearly indicated that managing the top predator (pike) in lakes such as these is essential to ensure that trout stocks are optimized for reproduction and exploitation by anglers. The leading fisheries Scientist in this regard is Dr. Martin O'Grady who has compiled numerous papers on this subject over the years and I am enclosing a couple of these although I presume these have been made available to the committee. I presume under this process all papers and publications from IFI will be made available to the committee? I would also note that Dr. Paddy



Gargan's PhD thesis studied the diet of pike on Lough Sheelin over a number of years and I presume such scientific evidence will be the backbone of any recommendations for management policy. More recently Dr. Robert Rosell of AFBI did some key research in the past few years on predation on trout in Lough Erne which identified that pike are 60 times more inclined to take a trout over a coarse fish again such experts as these three should all be invited to present to the expert committee charged with producing a policy fit for these fisheries into the future.

The key point that Dr. O'Grady has made in numerous presentations is that without management of the pike the lakes would become mediocre mixed stock fisheries and the ability to see the wild brown trout product as the best in Europe would be lost.

Recommendation 2:

- Re-assert the branded status of the premier wild brown trout fisheries and protect these as wild brown trout fisheries for the long term (not just with short term policies as has been the case with Inland Fisheries Ireland where policies that require strong management and long term management strategies are being revisited every few years) to include the following lakes: Loughs Corrib, Mask, Carra, Conn, Cullen, Arrow, Ennell, Sheelin, Derravaragh and to a lesser extent Lough Owel.

IFI has previously invested a significant amount of funds in these wild brown trout fisheries under the Tourism Angling Measure development programme between 1994 – 1999 during this programme €3million was invested in Loughs Corrib, Mask and Carra. It would be a disaster if the aims of this programme which clearly sought to develop these lakes as premier wild brown trout fisheries was 'undone' by changes in policies a short time later.

The last time these policies were reviewed it was acknowledged that the premier wild brown trout fisheries would be managed differently to other mixed stock lakes and that stock management on these lakes would continue – this is essential in whatever manner it takes. Currently similar management arrangements in Norway are done by commercial fishermen netting pike – and selling their catch. Similarly in Lough Erne commercial fishermen also remove pike under licence – on many of the great wild brown trout lakes in Ireland the state manages the stocks by a proven suite of management measures including netting and electrofishing. If the state cannot afford to do this work it may be possible to tender it to a third party.

Recommendation 3:

- Continue stock management to ensure these valuable wild brown trout fisheries are protected into the future.

When the policies were agreed by the last review one of the key recommendations was not carried through – this was the critical recommendation that anglers on the managed wild brown trout fisheries would be allowed to retain a pike of up to 84 cms daily. This was an integral component of the policy and was not enacted by the regulatory authorities. This was regrettable as it would have done several things: (1) it would have made a reasonably sized pike to be available to anglers who wished to keep pike to eat – there was an outcry some years ago when the pike byelaw was first introduced that those that wished to catch a pike to eat were being denied the opportunity as they were restricted to a pike of less than 50 cms. If the byelaw was amended then the anglers would have assisted the state in managing the pike population and the tourism benefit of having a reasonable sized pike available for consumption would have encouraged the pike anglers from Germany and elsewhere to return.

This was a lost opportunity as in the intervening years it has not been possible to estimate the benefit to tourism that this would have brought.

**Recommendation 4:**

- Change the pike regulations for the branded wild brown trout fisheries to permit the retention of pike for consumption up to 84 cms daily.

Some anglers come to seek Ferox trout – these are large predatory trout that returned with the brown trout after the last ice age and became residential and piscivorous. The fish principally fed on Arctic Char a species that is sadly extinct on Lough Corrib since the 1970's. In the 1970's when the Char were suddenly out competed by Roach – a recent accidental introduction – for food the Ferox fish had to change and evolve rapidly or become extinct too. The fish, over a small number of years switched nearly in its entirety to eating Roach and so have ensured their survival. These fish are probably not that numerous certainly the larger ones and the retaining of these should be discouraged.

Recommendation 5:

- The retention of any Ferox fish over 10 lbs should only be permitted by the advance purchase of a special tag (for a significant contribution) purchased from a local tackle shop and the funds for it to be used in part funding a development programme on a local river and this should be limited to one fish per person per season or some such restriction – until the status of this stock is properly determined and it is ascertained whether they are capable of sustaining a determined level of exploitation.

The great lakes are an amazing resource but the actual catch is unclear. Most fish are caught during the earlier part of the year when the fish are feeding voraciously following spawning this is March – May and these are the peak periods for angling effort and catches.

Recommendation 6:

- Introduce, through the local angling community and tourism operators, an easy system of recording catches and encourage this as a local management facility where Clubs and tourist anglers work together to provide useful management data for the state authorities.

Some argue that pike is native and other that it is not, is that really relevant? If it is seen that this is of importance it could be investigated. However from my perspective the key issue is that pike did not arrive in the west of Ireland with the first species after the last ice age and pike are still spreading through the country whereas brown trout are ubiquitous distributed throughout the land and have been for thousands of years. It is acknowledged that pike are naturalised in lakes like Lough Corrib however it would a useful exercise to use core samples from sediments from the lake to identify just when pike DNA was first found relative to trout DNA.

Recommendation 7:

- Investigate the possibility of undertaking sediment core sample research for pike and trout DNA to ascertain the first invasion of either species if possible.

Finally while I have a number of boats that can be rented on the lake during the trout season; due to the weather and temperature regime in the winter there are limited days when angling can easily and safely undertaken on this large lake in winter. I acknowledge specialist pike anglers come and fish the lake but many of these bring their own boats and equipment however from my perspective as an angling promoter it is difficult to promote winter fishing when the air and water temperatures can be very low and currently my insurance policy does not permit me to promote such an activity.

Yours sincerely

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