

“Public consultation – Pike Management in Brown Trout Fisheries”

JOINT SUBMISSION TO THE PIKE POLICY REVIEW GROUP – NOVEMBER 2016

Preface

IFPAC & IPS welcome the opportunity to make a submission to Inland Fisheries Ireland and to present their considered views on the management of pike in designated wild brown trout fisheries.

IFPAC & IPS recognise the importance that is placed upon the sustainability of fisheries capable of producing wild brown trout angling to domestic and to overseas trout anglers and is committed to assisting that process of sustainability through this submission.

The Environmental Threat to Fisheries supporting Wild Brown Trout

The flaw in calling any fishery a wild brown trout fishery is that it presumes the fishery is capable of fundamentally supporting wild brown trout. Fundamental prerequisites for supporting and sustaining wild brown trout angling is a functioning and protected spawning and nursery habitat; pristine water quality and a sustainable food source for all stages for growth and reproduction, no different for any fish species.

These prerequisites are fully understood by Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) and there exists good ongoing collaboration between IFI and the Office of Public Works (OPW) and other agencies to address historical habitat damage. It cannot be overstated that there is considerable evidence to prove that Ireland has failed quite considerably to protect some of the best fisheries in Ireland from environmental degradation over many decades, and those that support wild brown trout. The Water Framework Directive also seeks to address those challenging environmental threats.

The impact of environmental degradation on just some fisheries containing wild brown trout is well studied and is, or has been linked to a full suite of factors including agricultural water pollution; pig slurry water pollution; municipal and domestic sewage treatment systems; forestry; peat abstraction; overgrazing; arterial drainage schemes; river channel canalisation and food web diminution; fish disease and parasites.

Some or all of the above factors have had an impact on brown trout and other salmonid stocks on Ireland's most notable fisheries such as Lough's Sheelin; Corrib; Conn & Cullin. Igoe et al. (2003) discuss the contribution of eutrophication to the extinction of the pollution sensitive salmonid i.e. arctic char in Lough's Corrib and Conn during the 1970's and 1990's respectively.

Further evidence of environmental degradation is the '**severe**' decline of freshwater pearls in Ireland. NPWS (2013) state that the species require very clean and well oxygenated rivers, but point to sedimentation and enrichment of the freshwater pearl's habitat, as the cause of decline. The Owenriff river in County Galway, part of Lough Corrib is one such river that freshwater pearl mussels

are found. The report also states that ***“in some rivers, pollution is sufficiently severe that adult mussels are also dying”***.

The reader may wonder what this has to do with pike. The answer is quite simple. For many decades, pike on these same fisheries have been subjected to poisoning; culling and removal incurring considerable manpower and exchequer funding in doing so. All of this has been in the name of protecting wild brown trout, while at the same time confusing the fundamental prerequisites for sustainable wild brown trout fisheries. The evidence to date does not indicate that pike control is a successful solution in what are dynamic ecosystems, driven ultimately by environmental stressors that are continually evolving and changing.

The Irish Federation of Pike Angling Clubs and Irish Pike Society have examined historical scientific evidence claiming that pike specifically target trout and having done so, are convinced that the evidence is highly questionable, is biased and is potentially a counter-productive effort. We jointly call for a new era of management philosophy and strategy on lakes which seek to support wild brown trout.

We would draw attention to the statement made by the CEO of the Shannon Regional Fisheries Board to deputy Eamon Ryan TD in 2003, that in relation to the management of Lough Sheelin, ***“Unfortunately the pollution of the lake, over 30 years, has caused a serious imbalance in fish populations and it is an effort to control this imbalance that the Board removes fish”***.

It is simply impossible for the Irish Federation of Pike Angling Clubs & Irish Pike Society in all good conscience, to support pike control as a quick fix in attempting to address the environmental threats in fisheries containing wild brown trout. To support the continuance of pike control detracts from focusing the attention of anglers of all disciplines on the very much more common goal of improving the environmental conditions under which our fish live. Therefore, the following recommendations are submitted in respect on this consultation process.

Recommendations

1. Regarding biases in past scientific research; IFPAC & IPS state that we do not accept the science in relation to the necessity for controlling pike in fisheries containing brown trout and submit that all pike control should be ceased immediately;
2. That all pike control currently inferred necessary under the existing pike and trout policies (2014) is ceased entirely from the date of this submission;
3. That current and capital expenditure presently employed in the control of pike is re-designated towards the restoration of the aquatic habit for all species and of stream spawning and nursery habitats for the benefit of brown trout recruitment and arresting the decline in freshwater pearl survival;
4. That a study of population dynamics is undertaken in all brown trout fisheries, incorporating a holistic study of the entire eco-system and stressors, not solely confined to pike / trout interactions;

5. That the current national pike bye law is maintained as is, on all brown trout fisheries;
6. That 'Section 59' exemptions for the purpose of taking fish from a fishery for any purpose other than for scientific research, is removed from current legislation and not inserted into any future primary, or other fisheries legislation. Until such time, that no 'Section 59' exemptions are granted to remove fish;
7. That Inland Fisheries Ireland accepts its own scientific documentation showing that pike are native to Ireland;
8. That Inland Fisheries Ireland informs all state agencies e.g. National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute of Northern Ireland (AFBNI), OPW and all other relevant bodies that pike are native to Ireland;
9. That Inland Fisheries Ireland accepts its own scientific documentation showing that pike are opportunistic in their dietary habits;
10. That Inland Fisheries Ireland undertake a program of educating anglers and the general public of the importance of pike in the maintenance of healthy ecosystems, to redress previous depictions of pike as an ecological negative in fisheries containing brown trout;
11. That all Inland Fisheries Ireland staff are given appropriate training in the handling of pike and all fish species;
12. That Inland Fisheries Ireland recognises its own market research (2015) in the national strategy for angling development, and the potential for pike as an asset for angling tourism with a status as ***"the number one sport fish in Germany, France, the Netherlands and Italy"*** and that pike fishing is ***"also quite popular amongst anglers in the UK"***;
13. That Inland Fisheries Ireland recognises its own market research (2015) in the national strategy for angling development that Ireland boasts an incredible number of top class fisheries ***"including the Shannon and Erne catchments, the Cavan/Monaghan lakelands"*** and ***"the Great Western Lakes"***;
14. That Inland Fisheries Ireland recognises its own market research (2015) in the national strategy for angling development that ***"current pike management policies may impact negatively on Ireland's reputation as a prime pike angling destination"***;
15. That winter pike fishing be promoted on all Inland Fisheries Ireland managed and publicly owned fisheries;
16. That fly fishing for pike as a branch of the sport appealing to both pike anglers and traditional trout fly anglers is developed and promoted;

Conclusion

Please note that in the interest of brevity, supporting documentation is not being submitted at this time. However, IFPAC & IPS request the opportunity to present such supporting documentation to IFI directly in a meeting with the review group, so that the basis for the recommendations contained in this submission may be fully understood and included for within this review into 'Pike Management in Brown Trout Fisheries'.

References

Igoe F., O'Grady M.F., Tierney D. and Fitzmaurice P. (2003) Arctic Char *Salvelinus alpinus* (L.) in Ireland-A millennium review of its distribution and status with conservation recommendations. *Biology and Environment: Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* 103B (1) 9-22.

NPWS (2013) The Status of Protected EU Habitats and Species in Ireland. Overview Volume 1. Unpublished Report, National Parks & Wildlife Services. Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, Dublin, Ireland. Editor: Deirdre Lynn

Inland Fisheries Ireland, (2015) National Strategy for Angling Development. Inland Fisheries Ireland, Dublin. Available online: www.fisheriesireland.ie/AnglingInformation/national-strategy-for-angling-development.html

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