



Inland Fisheries Ireland

Brown Trout Policy

August 2014





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Prepared by the Brown Trout Policy Review Group

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Brown Trout Policy Review Group

Management Recommendations

1. Executive summary.

Brown trout are one of the very few indigenous fish species in Ireland. Geographically, they are widespread, being found in every catchment in the country.

In socio-economic terms, this fish species is very important, being highly regarded as an angling species by both Irish and tourist anglers alike. Because of its temperate climate and the shallow productive nature of its lakes, Ireland is the only country in Western Europe where lakes can support large trout stocks, which provides unique angling opportunities for fly fishermen. The relatively poor fish fauna in Ireland compared to other European countries means that Irish waters generally have a high capacity to support brown trout populations in the absence of many competitor and predatory fish species found in other European waters.

Against this background Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) set up an expert group to review and draft a new policy in relation to the management of Irish brown trout stocks both from conservation and a broader fishery management perspective. Members of the group included experienced IFI personnel from a broad range of disciplines – biological, fisheries management and marketing. Irish angling interests were also well represented on this group (three members).

This expert group had lengthy discussions on a broad range of pertinent issues and consulted widely with all interested parties within this sphere. Following all consultations and taking cognisance of the best available scientific advice, the expert group put forward recommendations that they felt were in the best interests of managing the brown trout resource in Ireland in the form of a policy.

2. Scope and objectives.

The Brown Trout Policy Review Group were charged with the generation of recommendations that would ensure the long-term sustainable management of this resource from both a conservation perspective while still retaining the socio-economic value of this resource to the community. The group did so in the knowledge that the trout's greatest piscivorous predator, the pike, also had a socio-economic value in some of the larger lake trout fisheries.

The group confined its deliberations to policy issues, purposely omitting comment in relation to implementation issues.

The group decided that a number of broader issues, while relating in part to brown trout policy, deserved consideration in their own right and, as such, lay beyond the objectives of this group. These are listed in Appendix 1.



3. Policy development process for the Brown Trout Policy Group.

The procedure on policy development is laid down by IFI. It is a very broad consultative process involving a wide diversity of stakeholders – IFI senior management, the Board of IFI, management personnel in DCENR, the National Inland Fisheries Forum and statutory consultees. It is intended that any document produced would be subject to review after three years.

The policy group consisted of seven members – Dr. Martin O’Grady (IFI Swords) who acted as chairperson, Martin Butler (IFI, Galway), Marcus Muller (IFI, Ballina) and William Walsh (IFI, Blackrock). John Chambers (IFPAC), Eamon Moore (TAFI) and Eamon Ross (NARA). Ms.Sandra Doyle (IFI, Swords) acted as secretary to the group.

The group met on four occasions between October 2011 and February 2012.

4. Terms of reference.

The group were careful to take cognisance of the following before generating policy recommendations:

- Best practice internationally.
- Irish and European legislation relating to this area.
- Existing legislation in this area.
- Corporate and other governance issues of relevance.
- The role of the private sector in the development of this resource.

5. Policy recommendations.

The following areas were considered to be central policy issues in relation to the management of brown trout stocks that should be incorporated into any documentation on this subject. A summary of the recommendations is provided here in relation to each of these areas.

5.1 Recommendations in the legislative area.

1. Consider the introduction of a national minimum size limit (20cm).
2. Seek to have a national “bag limit”- perhaps in line with the new national sea trout bag limit.
3. Seek the inclusion by the EU of Irish brown trout stocks in the Annex I or II species list of the Habitats Directive. On-going genetic studies of this species are illustrating the rich diverse nature of these stocks in Ireland and showing that the trout populations in our larger rivers are complex stocks entirely reliant on recruitment from their tributary sub-catchments. Failing the introduction of such a measure, consider the designation of the more important trout waters as National Heritage Areas (NHAs). The group feel strongly that wild Irish trout stocks be recognised and respected formally in law under the Fisheries Acts.



4. Consider the designation of specific rivers and lakes as managed wild brown trout fisheries. The inference here is that these waters would be managed to optimise brown trout stocks. In some instances (not all) this would recognise the validity of pike management programmes, the necessity for different regulations in relation to pike angling (see Section 5.4) and the particular sensitivity of such waters to organic pollution problems. The available IFI survey data base would place the following specific waters in this category:

Lakes – Loughs Leane, Inchiquin, Corrib, Mask, Carra, Cullen, Conn, Melvin, Sheelin, Ennel, Derravaragh, Arrow, Inchiquin and Loughrea Lake.

Rivers – Certain sections of many catchments which are known by IFI personnel to support quality brown trout stocks. For example, the Clare, Black and Robe Rivers in the Corrib, the Suir in Munster, the Liffey in Leinster and many more.

5. A ban on the sale of rod caught wild brown trout from any source.
6. IFI should be accommodated in law with the power to temporarily close fisheries and/or adjust regulations for brown trout fisheries in the interests of conservation in a speedier fashion than is currently available with the “bye-law system”.

5.2 Recommendations in relation to hatcheries and stocking programmes.

Consideration should be given to incorporating the following into any new policy document:

1. Stocking of inbred diploid hatchery brown trout fish should be confined to ponds and lakes where an inadequate trout native trout stock is present because of a lack of spawning opportunities.
2. Supplementation of existing large natural brown trout stocks should be confined to the introduction of triploid fish.
3. The current practice of stripping wild trout, rearing them in hatchery conditions and then releasing them in either their natal stream or another watercourse should be licensed only on the basis of scientific evidence that shows that such an exercise is not likely to impinge on the natural production of the channel where the fish are being stripped or interfere with the genetic makeup of stocks in the recipient waters.
4. IFI should make every effort to redirect the anglers’ focus from hatcheries to habitat enhancement projects by running educational programmes and involving anglers in pilot projects in this field.



5.3 Water quality issues.

The review group has expressed the view that the attainment and maintenance of high water quality in any brown trout fishery should be an absolute priority in any policy document relating to the management of this species. Research in recent years has illustrated clearly that trout cannot tolerate polluted conditions and require water quality values \geq Q 3 on the EPA scale to survive. In relation to “designated brown trout waters” (see 5.1 point 4 on previous page) a special effort should be made to ensure compliance with the terms of the Water Framework Directive

5.4 Management of pike populations in designated managed wild brown trout fisheries.

The review group feel that some changes are desirable in relation to current policy on this issue. The following proposals are made:

1. The group accept the science in relation to the necessity for controlling pike stocks in “designated managed wild brown trout fisheries” – a list of these waters has been provided above in Section 5.1.4. Scientific evaluation has shown that, currently, pike management is not necessary in a few of the aforementioned waters – Loughs Derravaragh and Ennel. This is an irrelevant issue currently in relation to Loughs Leane and Melvin where no pike are present. In accepting the science there is a recognition that IFI have to undertake pike removal exercises in the aforementioned waters.
2. It is the group’s view that IFI should, in relation to designated managed brown trout fisheries:
 - Transfer all live pike captured, where possible, to designated coarse fisheries.
 - Release all live pike captured that are \geq 85cm in length.
 - It is suggested that pike angling should be permitted on these trout fisheries with the angler being entitled to retain one fish per day that is $<$ 85 cm in length. All pike captured by anglers’ \geq 85 cm in length should be returned alive. There is no inference here that the same regulations should apply to other pike fisheries in Ireland. Recommendations in relation to angling rules on other pike fisheries are entirely a matter for the Pike Policy Review Group.
 - In the event of a trout angling group holding a pike angling competition on a designated wild brown trout fishery the same rules should apply. In these circumstances surplus pike (more than one fish per angler, per day, for fish $<$ 85 cm) should be retained alive, if possible, and transferred to a suitable coarse fishery, assistance from IFI personnel will be crucial to the success of this operation. In certain restricted circumstances IFI may also authorise designated angling clubs to fish for and kill pike that are caught during permitted angling competitions on designated watercourses. However all pike \geq 85 cm caught in such competitions should be released alive.



5.5 Policy issues in relation to the licensing of State owned brown trout fisheries.

1. Consider a ten-year license strategy with performance reviews at two-year intervals.
2. A strategic plan should be made by the licence holder for the proper development of the fishery to comply with a development framework of the State body made in consultation with the angling community. The plan should be for a three to five year period and be comprehensive in terms of defining its objectives.
3. Clear regulations for all aspects of managing the fishery should be specified and enforced.
4. Regular angling returns should be made to the State.
5. Clear IFI signage should be in position at fishery boundaries, particularly in riverine situations. Signs should display the Inland Fisheries Ireland name and logo, and designation or number of the fishery. Signs should also display the opening and closing dates of the fishery. The licence holders name, logo and entitlement could appear on a secondary sign affixed below the permanent sign.

5.6 Habitat enhancement issues.

After water quality issues, the question of habitat maintenance/enhancement is regarded as the single most important issue in relation to ensuring the long-term viability of quality brown trout stocks. Any policy document in relation to this species should:

1. Recognise this fact and ensure that available resources are directed towards addressing shortfalls in this area.
2. Understand that many such programmes (shrub pruning or placement of spawning gravels in drained rivers for example) are not capital works programmes but cyclical and, of necessity, repetitive in nature.
3. Acknowledge that regular ecological/genetic surveys are essential in helping to pinpoint problem areas and measure change, thereby ensuring maximum returns on investment in this area. This is particularly important given the acceleration in recent years in relation to the introduction of exotic species – zebra mussels in most trout lakes, the spread of dace through the Rivers Barrow and Suir Catchments and the likely spread of asian clams through many catchments currently of importance as brown trout fisheries.
4. Continued liaison with a range of other State Agencies is crucial in ensuring that proposed changes in Government policy are not likely to impinge negatively on the brown trout resource.

5.7 Future research programmes.

It is crucial that wild brown trout research should continue, in tandem with developmental and marketing programmes in this field. Key features should include;-



1. On-going survey programmes to monitor change in the more important brown trout fisheries are essential - as a means of both assessing the effectiveness of various developmental exercises and evaluating the impact of new invasive species on the ecology of the resource.
2. Complete a micro-satellite DNA analysis of trout stocks in all designated managed trout fisheries in the country. The completion of such studies to date on Loughs Corrib, Mask, Ennel, the Rivers Boyne and Suir systems, in combination with available ecological data, has moved IFI's capacity to manage these fisheries to a much higher level. Ensure that a DNA analysis programme becomes an integral part of all future large scale monitoring programmes in important brown trout catchments.
3. Strive to achieve a close working liaison between IFI research, operational and marketing staffs to ensure that all relevant personnel are kept abreast of the status of trout stocks.
4. Ensure that the current EREP (Environmental River Enhancement Programme) programme) with OPW continues. An on-going programme over the next 20 years is required to restore all drained brown trout rivers. A completion of this exercise could greatly increase the availability of quality riverine brown trout angling water and further enhance the recruitment of trout to the quality lake trout fisheries.

5.8 Marketing of brown trout angling in Ireland.

This group acknowledges the value the socio economic study of recreational angling has placed on angling in Ireland. As a follow on from such an exercise, the group feel that, in relation to brown trout in particular, investigation in relation to the following areas would be important:

- Diversity of brown trout angling product in Ireland
- Quality and quantity of prime brown trout waters
- Key brown trout angling products & defined market segments
- Key target markets
- Standards for "promotable" brown trout angling tourism
- Competitiveness
- Availability and accessibility of brown trout waters for tourist anglers
- Quality and quantity of angling infrastructure (angler-friendly accommodation, guiding services, boat hire etc.)
- Up-skilling and training for the supply side of the industry
- SWOT Analysis



5.9 Biosecurity.

All anglers should strictly adhere to biosecurity protocols, both pre- and post- all angling sessions, in order to ensure that no invasive species and harmful fish pathogens are introduced or spread within the country.

1. Best biosecurity practice guidelines for anglers, and other key stakeholder groups, have been produced by IFI (see www.fisheriesireland.ie) and these should be circulated widely among key stakeholder groups.
2. Because of the seriousness of the risk associated with invasive species and fish pathogens, it is recommended that strict adherence to these guidelines should be made a condition of membership of all angling clubs and federations.
3. It is further recommended that information boards and facilities to disinfect angling tackle and protective clothing should be provided at all major air and sea ports in Ireland. It should also be mandatory for anglers travelling from abroad to show proof that their angling equipment has been disinfected prior to entering the country. Failing this, the tackle must be disinfected at the point of entry into the country.
4. International collaboration in respect of biosecurity matters must be encouraged.



Appendix 1

The brown trout policy group felt that the following list of items, while of concern to brown trout policy were broader issues that need to be addressed in other fora.

5. Angler contributions towards the management costs of inland fisheries.
6. A policy directed at the control of invasive species.
7. The necessity to develop on the findings of the socio-economic study on recreational angling.
8. A redefined role for water keepers in Ireland.
9. Tackling the question of litter control in and around fishery locations.
10. The question of regularising insurance issues for all national and tourist anglers and minimising costs in this area.



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