

National Research Survey Programme

Lakes 2020

Lough Acoose

IFI/2021/1-4546



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National Research Survey Programme

**Fish Stock Survey of Lough Acoose,
August 2020**

Inland Fisheries Ireland, 3044 Lake Drive, Citywest Business Campus, Dublin 24.

CITATION: Corcoran, W., Connor, L., McLoone, P., Bateman, A., Cierpial, D., Gavin, A., Gordon, P., McCarthy, E., Putthaaree, D., Twomey, C., Matson, R., Robson, S., Duffy, P., Rocks, K., Donovan, R., Crowley, D., and Kelly, F.L. (2021) *Fish Stock Survey of Lough Acoose, September 2020*. National Research Survey Programme, Inland Fisheries Ireland, 3044 Lake Drive, Citywest Business Campus, Dublin 24.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors wish to gratefully acknowledge the help and co-operation of all their colleagues in Inland Fisheries Ireland.

The authors would also like to thank Lough Acoose fishery manager Michael O' Shea for his assistance.

The authors would also like to acknowledge the funding provided for the project from the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment for 2020.

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1.1 Introduction

Lough Acoose is situated in Co. Kerry in the upper Caragh catchment (Plate 1.1 and Fig 1.1). The lake is located approximately seven kilometres south of Killorglin, between Glencar and Kilorglin (Fig. 1.1). The lake has a surface area of 66ha and a maximum depth of 19m. Lough Acoose is categorised as typology class 4 (as designated by the EPA for the Water Framework Directive), i.e. deep (mean depth >4m), greater than 50ha and low alkalinity (<20mg/l CaCO₃).

Lough Acoose forms part of the Killarney National Park, Macgillicuddy's Reeks and Caragh River catchment candidate Special Area of Conservation. This is a large area that encompasses a wide variety of habitats designated under Annex I of the EU Habitats Directive, including blanket bog, alluvial woodlands, alpine heath and both upland and lowland oligotrophic lakes. The site has also been selected for the following species: Killarney fern, slender naiad, freshwater pearl mussel, Kerry slug, marsh fritillary, Killarney shad, Atlantic salmon, brook lamprey, river lamprey, sea lamprey, lesser horseshoe bat and otter; all species listed on Annex II of the EU Habitats Directive (NPWS, 2005).

Lough Acoose is known to hold a stock of brown trout and gets a run of salmon grilse from July onwards. A review paper on the distribution and status of Arctic Char in Ireland (Igoe *et al.*, 2003) a rare and threatened species listed in the Irish Red Data Book for fish as vulnerable (King, 2011), reported that Arctic char were not present in the lake following a 1983 survey. In 2006 however, an EPA funded PhD studentship at University College Cork investigating the vulnerability of Arctic char eggs to environmental change found a population present in the lake (E. Morrissey, *pers. com.*). Recent IFI surveys also confirmed the presence of a population of Arctic char in the lake (Kelly *et al.*, 2009a, 2012a, 2015a, 2015b and Connor *et al* 2018)

Lough Acoose was previously surveyed in 2008, 2011, 2014 and 2017 as part of the Water Framework Directive surveillance monitoring programme (Kelly *et al.*, 2009a, 2012a, 2015a, 2015b and Connor *et al* 2018). During the 2017 survey, brown trout and Arctic char were found to be the dominant species present in the lake. Eels and salmon were also captured during the surveys.

This report summarises the results of the 2020 fish stock survey carried out on the lake, as part of the Water Framework Directive surveillance monitoring programme and IFI's Arctic char research programme.



Plate 1.1. Lough Acoose (photo taken near the launch site on the western side of the lake)

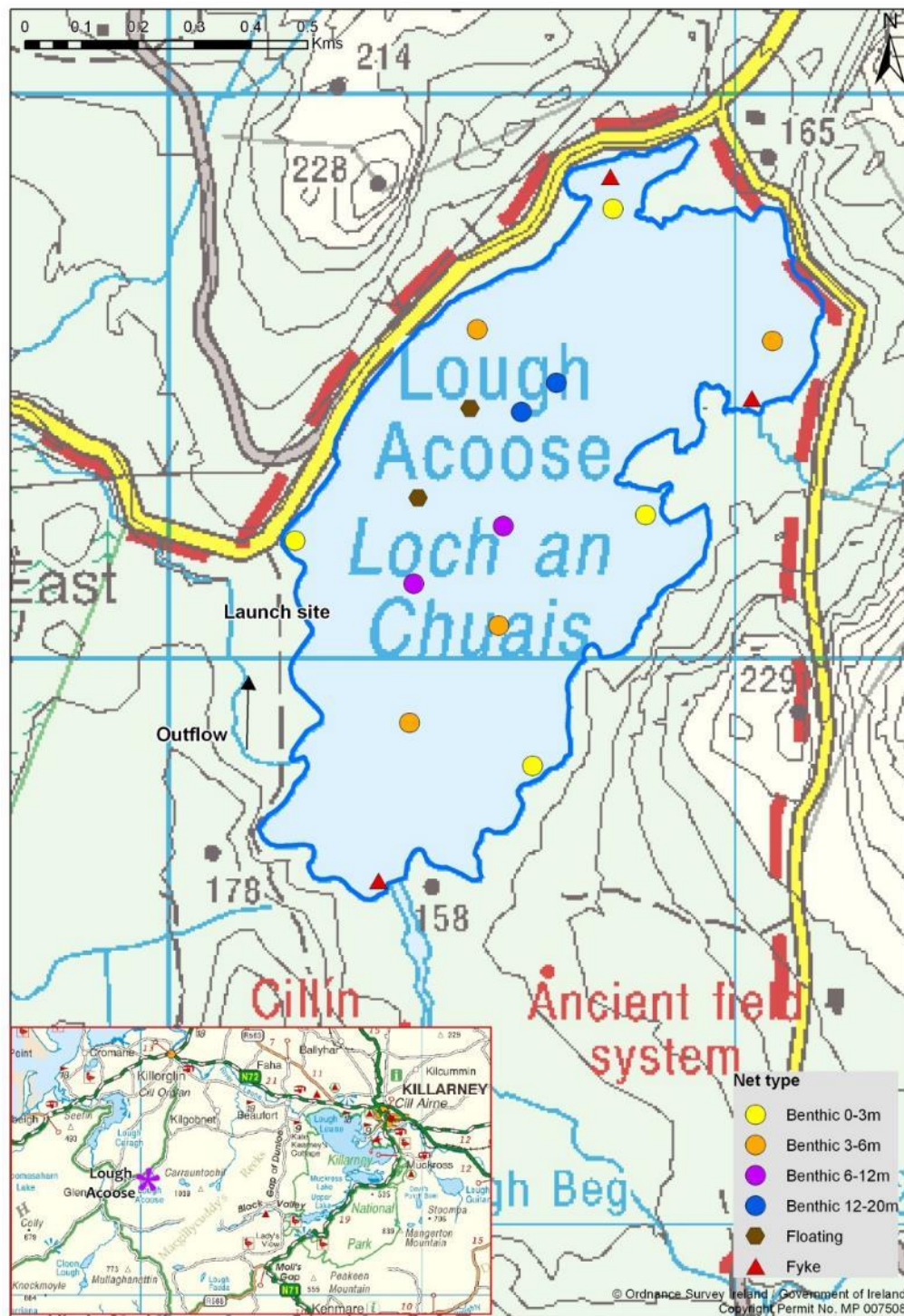


Fig. 1.1 Location map of Lough Acoose showing locations and depths of each net (outflow is indicated on map)

1.2 Methods

1.2.1 Netting methods

Lough Acoose was surveyed over two nights between the 21st and 23rd of September 2020. A total of three sets of Dutch fyke nets (Fyke), 12 benthic monofilament multi-mesh (12 panel, 5-55mm mesh size) CEN standard survey gill nets (BM CEN) (4 @ 0-2.9m, 4 @ 3-5.9m, 2 @ 6-11.9m and 2 @ 12-19.9m) and two floating monofilament multi-mesh (FM CEN) (12 panel, 5-55mm mesh size) CEN standard survey gill nets were deployed in the lake (17 sites). Nets were deployed in the same locations as were randomly selected in the previous survey. A handheld GPS was used to mark the precise location of each net. The angle of each gill net in relation to the shoreline was randomised.

All fish were measured and weighed on site and scales were removed from all brown trout and sea trout. Live fish were returned to the water whenever possible (i.e. when the likelihood of their survival was considered to be good). Samples of fish were retained for further analysis. Fish were frozen immediately after the survey and transported back to the IFI laboratory for later dissection.

1.2.2 Fish diet

Total stomach contents were inspected and individual items were counted and identified to the lowest taxonomic level possible. The percentage frequency occurrence (%FO) of prey items were then calculated to identify key prey items (Amundsen *et al.*, 1996).

$$FO_i = \left(\frac{N_i}{N} \right) * 100$$

Where:

FO_i is the percentage frequency of prey item i ,

N_i is the number of fish with prey i in their stomach,

N is total number of fish with stomach contents.

1.2.3 Biosecurity - disinfection and decontamination procedures

Procedures are required for disinfection of equipment in order to prevent dispersal of alien species and other organisms to uninfected waters. A standard operating procedure was compiled by Inland Fisheries Ireland for this purpose (Caffrey, 2010) and is followed by staff in IFI when moving between water bodies.



1.3 Results

1.3.1 Species Richness

A total of four fish species were recorded on Lough Acoose in September 2020, with 460 fish being captured. The number of each species captured by each gear type is shown in Table 1.1. Brown trout was the most common fish species recorded, followed by Arctic char, eels and salmon. During the previous surveys in 2008, 2011, 2014 and 2017 the same species composition was recorded except for salmon which were not recorded in 2008 (Kelly *et al.*, 2009a, 2012a, 2015a, 2015b and Connor *et al* 2018).

Table 1.1. Number of each fish species captured by each gear type during the survey on Lough Acoose, September 2020

Scientific name	Common name	Number of fish captured			
		BM CEN	FM CEN	Fyke	Total
<i>Salmo trutta</i>	Brown trout	299	27	26	352
<i>Salvelinus alpinus</i>	Arctic char	101	0	0	101
<i>Salmo salar</i>	Salmon	3	0	0	3
<i>Anguilla anguilla</i>	European eel	0	0	4	4

1.3.2 Fish abundance

Fish abundance (mean CPUE) and biomass (mean BPUE) were calculated as the mean number/weight of fish caught per metre of net. For all fish species except eel, CPUE/BPUE is based on all nets, whereas eel CPUE/BPUE is based on fyke nets only. Mean CPUE and BPUE for all fish species captured in the 2008, 2011, 2014, 2017 and 2020 surveys are summarised in Table 1.2 and illustrated in Figures 1.2 and 1.3.

Brown trout

Brown trout was the dominant species in terms of abundance (CPUE) and biomass (BPUE). CPUE and BPUE for brown trout were trending upwards across all five sampling occasions (Table 1.2; Figs. 1.2 and 1.3).

Arctic char

Arctic char was the next most abundant species in terms of both CPUE and BPUE. The mean Arctic char CPUE and BPUE fluctuated slightly over the five sampling occasions. The overall trend was an increase in both CPUE and BPUE between 2008 and 2020 (Table 1.2; Figs. 1.2 and 1.3).



Table 1.2. Mean (S.E.) CPUE and BPUE for all fish species captured on Lough Acoose, 2008, 2011, 2014, 2017 and 2020

Scientific name	Common name	2008	2011	2014	2017	2020
Mean CPUE (\pmS.E.)						
<i>Salmo trutta</i>	Brown trout	0.363 (0.084)	0.405 (0.069)	0.431 (0.077)	0.500 (0.092)	0.665 (0.167)
<i>Salvelinus alpinus</i>	Arctic char	0.066 (0.022)	0.122 (0.031)	0.084 (0.021)	0.184 (0.060)	0.200 (0.063)
<i>Salmo salar</i>	Salmon	-	0.012 (0.008)	0.003 (0.002)	0.004 (0.004)	0.007 (0.006)
<i>Anguilla anguilla</i>	European eel*	0.117 (0.053)	0.033 (0.016)	0.022 (0.014)	0.033 (0.010)	0.022 (0.022)
Mean BPUE (\pmS.E.)						
<i>Salmo trutta</i>	Brown trout	31.634 (7.127)	37.091 (6.957)	33.379 (6.210)	46.059 (7.942)	53.630 (14.675)
<i>Salvelinus alpinus</i>	Arctic char	2.866 (0.969)	7.147 (1.825)	3.621 (0.958)	8.262 (2.943)	9.818 (3.348)
<i>Salmo salar</i>	Salmon	-	5.349 (5.085)	0.093 (0.053)	6.800 (6.800)	4.381 (4.381)
<i>Anguilla anguilla</i>	European eel*	23.766 (13.302)	5.437 (1.867)	6.731 (4.141)	4.600 (2.736)	5.633 (5.633)

Note: On the rare occasion where biomass data was unavailable for an individual fish, this was determined from a length/weight regression for that species (Connor *et al.*, 2017).

*Eel CPUE and BPUE based on fyke nets only

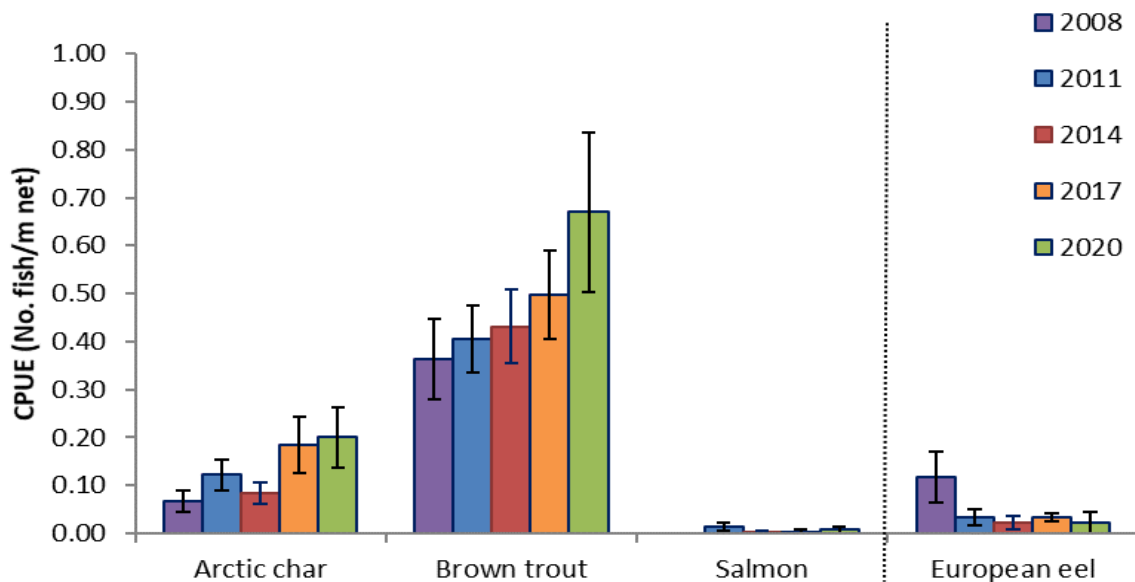


Fig. 1.2. Mean (\pm S.E.) CPUE for all fish species captured in Lough Acoose (Eel CPUE based on fyke nets only), 2008, 2011, 2014, 2017 and 2020

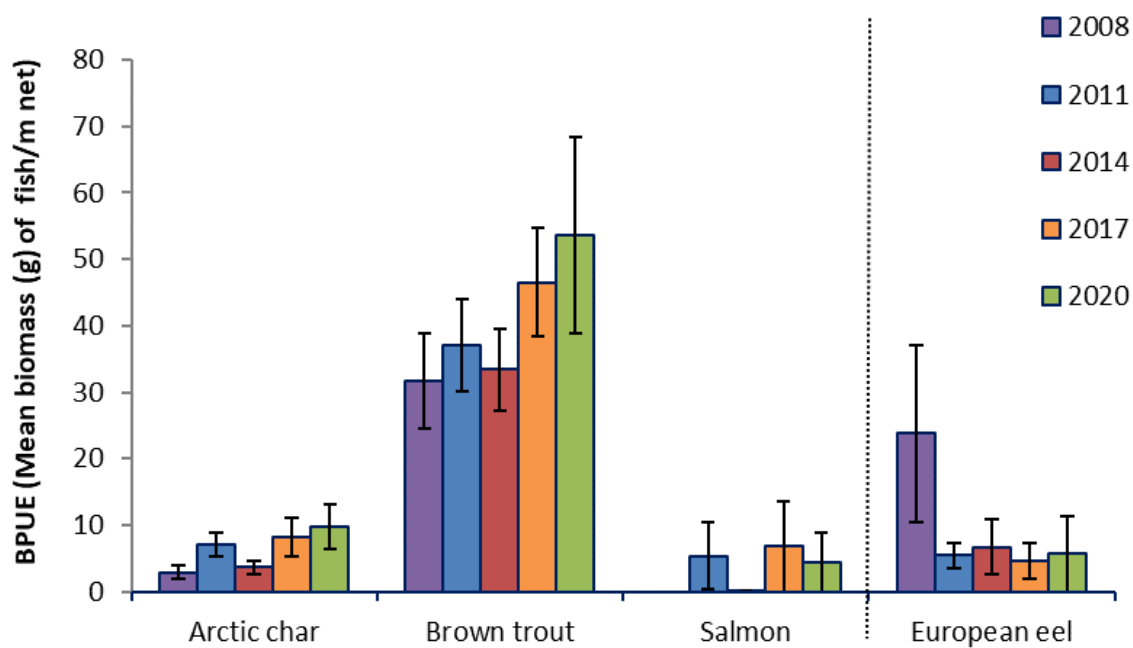


Fig. 1.3. Mean (\pm S.E.) BPUE for all fish species captured in Lough Acoose (Eel BPUE based on fyke nets only), 2008, 2011, 2014, 2017 and 2020

1.3.3 Length frequency distributions and growth

Brown trout

Brown trout captured during the 2020 survey ranged in length from 7.0 to 43.5cm (mean = 18.7cm) (Fig. 1.4). Length of brown trout at 1 year old (L1) was estimated at 7.7cm (Table 1.3). Five age classes were recorded in the sample aged, ranging from 0+ to 5+. No 4+ fish were recorded. The dominant age class was 2+ (Fig. 1.4). Brown trout captured during the 2008, 2011, 2014 and 2017 surveys had similar length and age ranges (Fig.1.4).

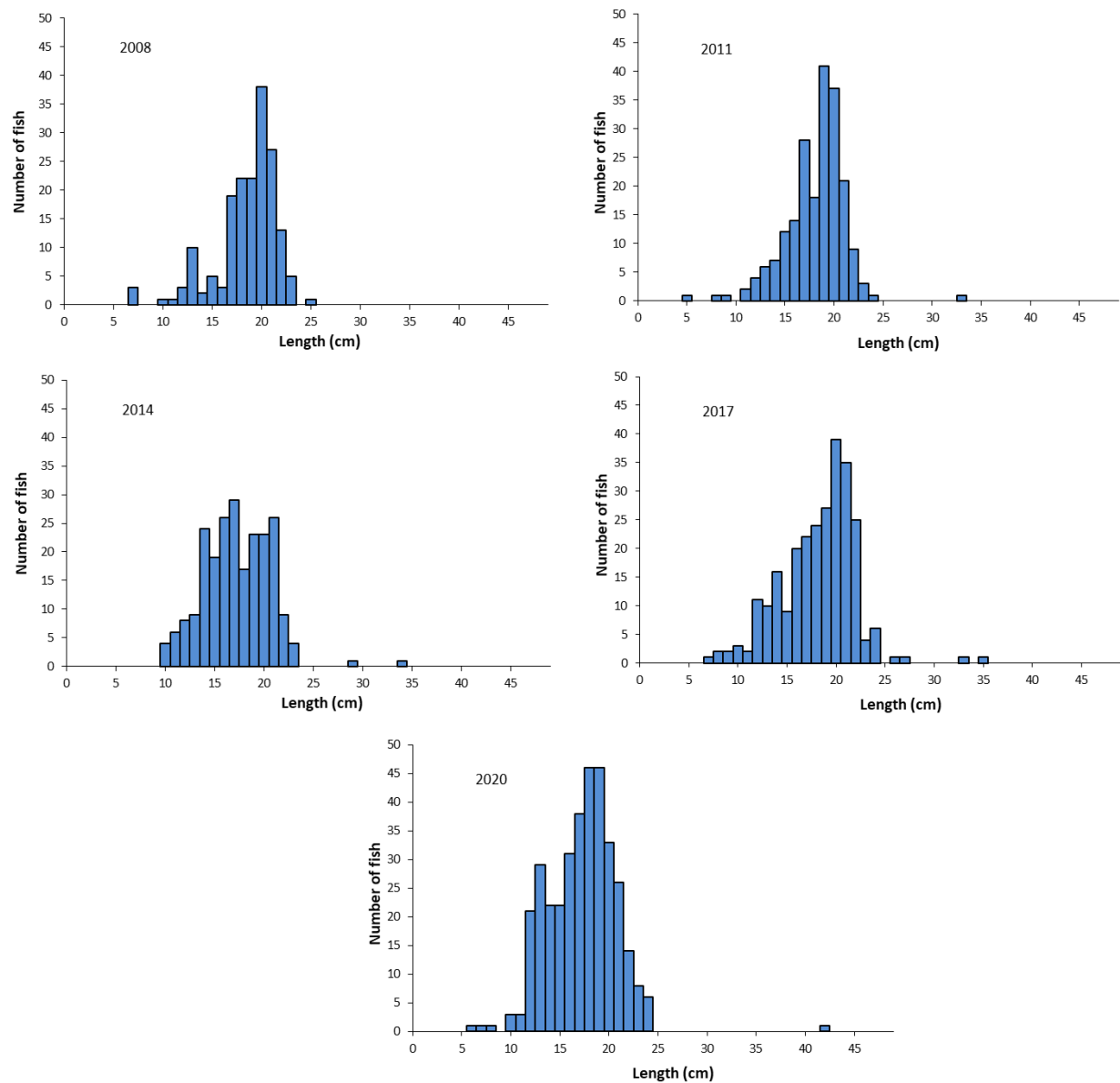


Fig. 1.4. Length frequency of brown trout captured on Lough Acoose, 2008, 2011, 2014, 2017 and 2020

Table 1.3. Mean (\pm S.E.) brown trout length (cm) at age for Lough Acoose, September 2020

	L ₁	L ₂	L ₃
Mean (\pm S.E.)	7.7 (0.2)	16.3 (0.3)	21.3 (0.7)
N	111	57	3
Range	4.3-12.9	12.0-21.0	20.3-22.6

Arctic char

Arctic char captured during the 2020 survey ranged in length from 7.2cm to 19.5cm (mean = 15.4cm) (Fig.1.5) with five age classes present, ranging from 0+ to 4+. Arctic char captured during the previous surveys (2008-2017) had a similar length and age range (Fig.1.5).

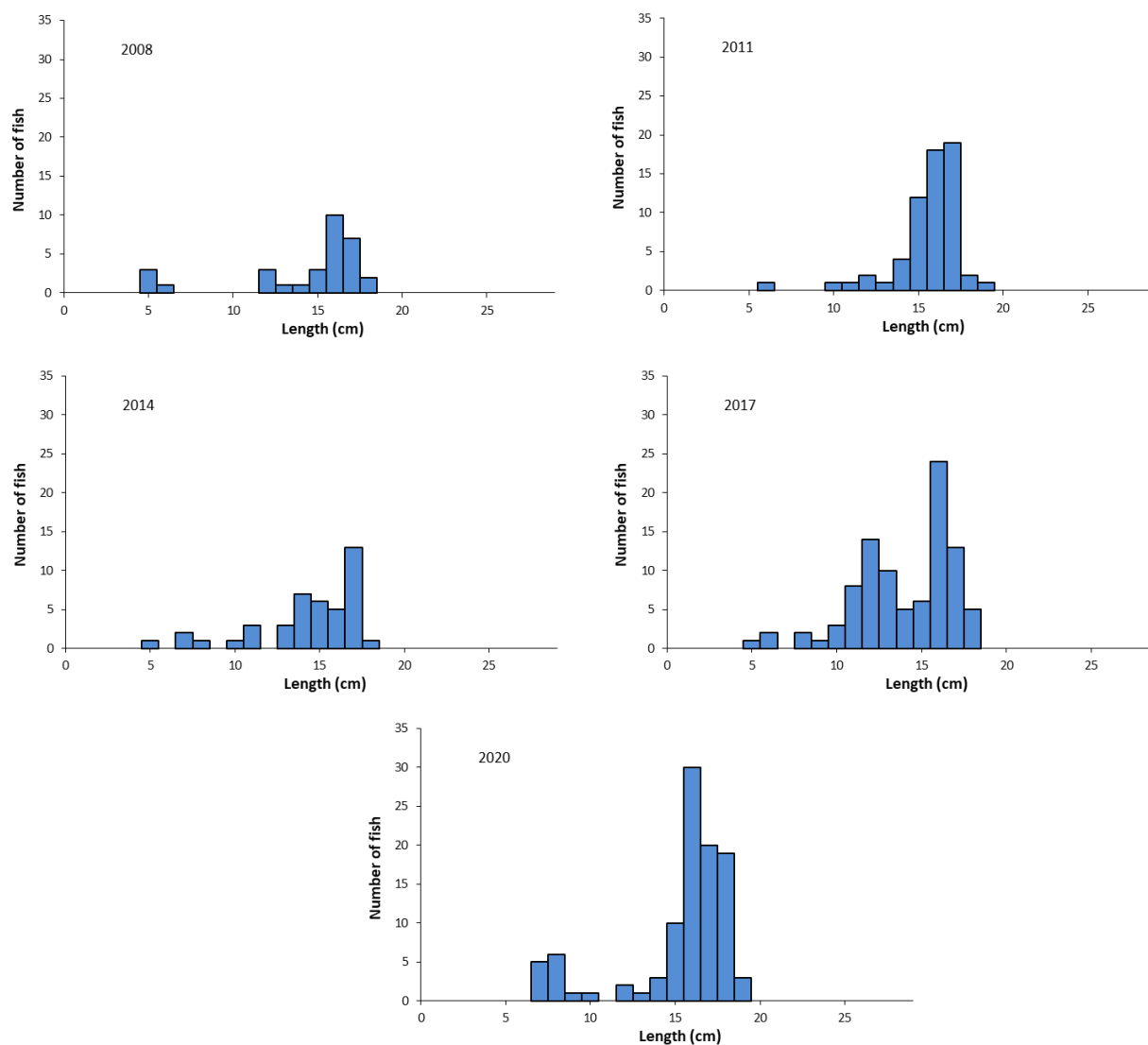


Fig. 1.5. Length frequency of Arctic char captured on Lough Acoose, 2008, 2011, 2014, 2017 and 2020

Other fish species

Four eels were captured during the 2020 survey and ranged in length from 48.0cm to 61.0cm. Three salmon were captured ranging from 12.5cm to 59.5cm. A scale sample showed the salmon measuring

59.5 cm was aged 2.1+ (i.e. it migrated to sea as a 2-year-old smolt returning the following summer after one winter at sea).

1.3.4 Stomach and diet analysis

Dietary analysis studies provide a good indication of the availability of food items and the angling methods that are likely to be successful. The stomach contents of a subsample of brown trout and Arctic char captured during the survey were examined and are presented below.

Brown trout

Adult trout usually feed principally on crustaceans (*Asellus* sp. and *Gammarus* sp.), insects (principally chironomid larvae and pupae) and molluscs (snails) (Kennedy and Fitzmaurice, 1971, O'Grady, 1981). A total of 102 stomachs were examined. Of these 74 were found to contain no prey items. Of the remaining 28 stomachs containing food, three (10.7%) contained fish, two brown trout (7.1%) contained fish exclusively. One (3.6%) brown trout stomach contained both fish and invertebrates. Five (17.9%) stomachs contained only invertebrates, while three (10.7%) contained both invertebrates and zooplankton. Zooplankton was the sole diet of 17 brown trout (60.7%). (Fig. 1.6).

Arctic char

A total of 86 Arctic char stomachs were examined. Of these 36 were found to contain no prey items. Of the 50 stomachs which contained food, all 50 (100%) contained zooplankton.

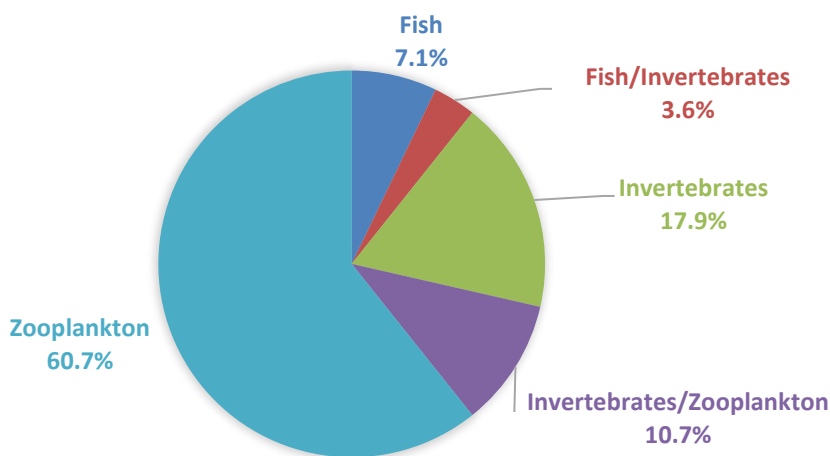


Fig 1.6. Diet of brown trout (n=28) captured on Lough Acoose, 2020 (% FO)



1.4 Summary and ecological status

A total of four fish species were recorded in Lough Acoose in September 2020. Brown trout was the dominant species in terms of abundance (CPUE) and biomass (BPUE) captured in the survey gill nets in 2020.

Mean CPUE and BPUE for brown trout increased between 2008 and 2020. In 2020, brown trout captured ranged in age from 0+ to 5+. No 4+ fish were recorded. The dominant age class was 2+ and few fish older than 3+ were recorded.

Arctic char CPUE and BPUE fluctuated slightly over the five sampling occasions. The overall trend showed an increase in both CPUE and BPUE between 2008 and 2020. Arctic char ranged in age from 0+ to 4+. All five age classes were recorded.

Classification and assigning lakes with an ecological status is a critical part of the WFD monitoring programme. It allows River Basin District managers to identify and prioritise lakes that currently fall short of the minimum “Good Ecological Status” that is required if Ireland is not to incur penalties. A multimetric fish ecological classification tool (Fish in Lakes – ‘FIL’) was developed for the island of Ireland (Ecoregion 17) using IFI and Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute Northern Ireland (AFBINI) data generated during the NSSHARE Fish in Lakes project (Kelly *et al.*, 2008). This tool was further developed during 2010 (FIL2) in order to make it fully WFD compliant, including producing EQR values for each lake and associated confidence in classification (Kelly *et al.*, 2012b).

Using the FIL2 classification tool, Lough Acoose has been assigned an ecological status of Good for 2020 based on the fish populations present. In previous years the lake was also assigned a fish status of Good in 2008, 2011, 2014 and 2017 (Fig. 1.7).

In the 2013 to 2018 surveillance monitoring reporting period, the EPA assigned Lough Acoose an overall ecological status of Good.

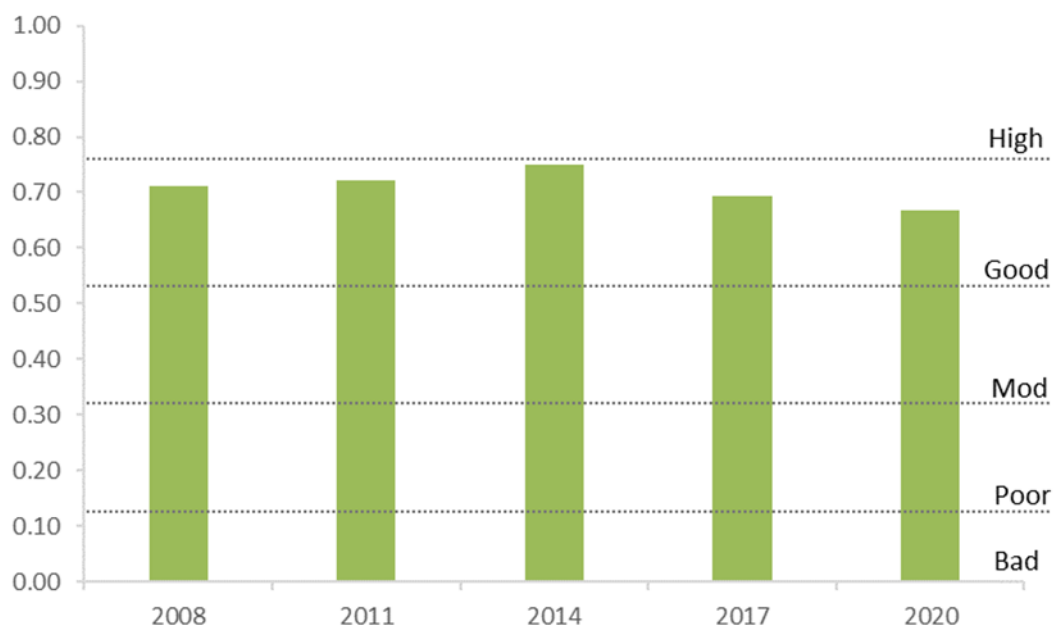


Fig. 1.7. Fish ecological status of Lough Acoose 2008 to 2020.



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