



Iascach Intíre Éireann
Inland Fisheries Ireland

SPOTLIGHT
series

Enforcing laws and bringing
perpetrators to justice

"It can be tough, but I remind myself daily that we do it for our fish and our habitats,"
Owen Kelly of Inland Fisheries Ireland.

An Inland Fisheries Ireland
fisheries officer on patrol.



Bringing people to justice for pollution, damage and illegal fishing

"Doing this job involves investigating incidents and prosecuting people. It can be tough, but I remind myself daily that we do it for our fish and our habitats. Salmon numbers are dropping and habitats are

under strain – we see it every day – and they need all the support we can give them," says Owen Kelly, Assistant Inspector with Inland Fisheries Ireland, (pictured on the left).



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Did you know? The Republic of Ireland has over 74,000 km of rivers and streams.

An Inland Fisheries Ireland fisheries officer inspecting a drone.

Protected by law

In Ireland, the protection of our fish is covered by [legislation and directives](#), some of which are specific to certain species that need added protection such as Atlantic salmon, sea trout, bass and Atlantic bluefin tuna. Inland Fisheries Ireland itself was established under the Inland Fisheries Act 2010 and it also derives its main powers from the 1959 Fisheries Consolidation Act and the 1977 Water Pollution Act.

Another important piece of legislation is the EU Habitats Directive, which deals with animals, plants and habitats in need of protection and has established Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) across Europe. The maintenance of water quality and aquatic ecosystems is laid out in the EU Water Framework Directive.

In the Republic of Ireland, we have over 74,000 kilometres of rivers and streams and around 128,000 hectares of lakes. Inland Fisheries Ireland is the state agency responsible for conserving, protecting and managing these waters, and inshore waters within 12 miles of baselines. As part of this, it is empowered with ensuring the legislation is upheld.



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Primary school students taking part in the Something Fishy educational programme.

Educating people on our fish and resources

Mitigating any potential threats is preferable to acting after damage has been done. The organisation therefore places a lot of focus on [engaging people](#) – particularly young people – around the importance and vulnerability of our resource. “Our long-running [Something Fishy](#) educational programme for primary school children teaches them about fish, water, angling and the environment,” explains Owen. “Another example we have is the [Dublin Angling Initiative](#), that introduces youth clubs, schools and community groups from disadvantaged areas to angling.” Inland Fisheries Ireland also offers consultation to builders, engineers, farm advisors and community groups, when proposed development is to take place.

Breaches of legislation

Unfortunately, people do break the law and can have their property seized or even end up with a custodial sentence. Inland Fisheries Ireland has a confidential hotline, which members of the public can call on 0818 34 74 24 to report illegal fishing, water pollution or invasive species. “We look into every one of these reports,” says Owen. “We also have our own eyes and ears on the ground – and also on the water and in the sky: our Fisheries Officers and Environmental Officers are alert to any illegal activity and use equipment such as our fleet of RIBs (Rigid Inflatable Boats), Tetra and VHF (Very High Frequency) radios, mobile phones, thermal imaging equipment, drones and our detection dog unit.”

They are looking for illegal fishing – both on a small and large scale – and fish kills. They are alert to direct habitat destruction and pollution, which can be found anywhere but most commonly occur in areas of intense agriculture, or for example when people extract gravel from a riverbed to sell commercially or to increase drainage.

When a suspected breach occurs, Inland Fisheries Ireland investigates this thoroughly and follows it through to an appropriate conclusion. “We are well schooled in this whole process, from issuing Fixed Penalty Notices, right through to taking our own prosecution to court, including appearing on the stand to give evidence when needed,” explains Owen. “The whole team acts with absolute professionalism, even when at times they are out in the dark of night gathering evidence and carrying out surveillance. They sometimes face verbal and physical assault in the course of their duties, and so we ensure they are fully trained on what to do if this occurs.”



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“Penalties....may include substantial fines and/or custodial sentences”
Andrew Gillespie of Inland Fisheries Ireland.

Image taken at the site
of the pollution incident.



A case in point: man taken to court for environmental damage

Andrew Gillespie, Senior Environmental Officer, (pictured above), describes the detailed work involved in bringing a perpetrator to justice: “This is just one case of many that is typical of how companies or individuals can cause serious and lasting damage to the fisheries resource, breaking the law in doing so and then finding themselves standing in front of a District Court Judge.

“When we discovered discoloured water in a tributary in my area, we investigated this further, knowing that it is often caused by excavation: subsoil or clay can be exposed in a river and this gives rise to suspended solids in the water. We were particularly concerned as that river system has high quality salmonid spawning gravels, and this had occurred at a time when salmon and trout spawn (reproduce). I took samples both of the affected water and also unaffected water.

“Following the river upstream, we found the farmland where the disturbance had taken place. An excavator was present and we spoke to its operator who confirmed he had been using it along the riverbank.

“As suspected breaches of fisheries legislation had occurred, I formally cautioned the man, and directed him to take specific remedial action.

I informed him that the landowner would be required to speak to me about the matter, and I offered him the opportunity to take a duplicate set of the water samples I had taken. I took photographs of the site and my set of water samples were held in a chill box in a locked Inland Fisheries Ireland vehicle until they were conveyed to a lab for testing the following day.

“We took considerable care with the solicitor to prepare the evidence and when the case went to court some months later, I took to the witness box. The defendant was ordered to pay €4,200 to cover fines issued in breach of specific pieces of legislation and legal costs.”

“There are many other incidents like these that we handle, also in particular around illegal fishing” continues Owen. In each of these, the teams at Inland Fisheries Ireland follow strict procedures, and gather factual evidence, which may be physical, such as fishing nets apprehended at the scene of an incident. They have built up excellent relationships over many years with local Gardaí and other authorities. “Penalties are ultimately at the discretion of the judge,” notes Andrew, “and may include substantial fines and/or custodial sentences.”



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Devastating impact

These acts of pollution, damage and illegal fishing take an obvious and devastating toll on not only fish and our environment, but on local communities. With angling worth almost €1 billion to the wider Irish economy annually, a lot of people stand to lose out.

“Every one of us in Ireland is a custodian of our fish and habitats,” observes Owen. “At Inland Fisheries Ireland, we are fortunate to be able to enforce the laws that are designed to ensure they are still there for future generations to enjoy.”

Acts of pollution, environmental damage and illegal fishing take a devastating toll.

For more on the work of Inland Fisheries Ireland, please visit www.FisheriesIreland.ie.

To report illegal fishing, water pollution or invasive species, call our confidential 24-hour hotline on **0818 34 74 24**.



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beolíne / hotline

0818 34 74 24

Oscailte 24 uair an lae / 7 lá in aghaidh na seachtaine
Open 24 hours a day / 7 days a week



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