Fish in Rivers Factsheet

NWRBD **Clonmany River Catchment** **Factsheet: 2024/05**

The Clonmany River Catchment is located within the North Western River Basin District in the Inishowen Peninsula Co. Donegal and covers an area of approximately 64km^2. The Clonmany River rises from the back of the Bulbin Mountains flowing northwest through the village of Clonmany before entering the sea in Tullagh Bay. The catchment comprises of the Clonmany River and two tributaries; the Cloontagh River draining the east of the catchment joins the Clonmany River at Gortoran Bridge and the Ballyhallan River which joins the Clonmany River at the rear of the Riverside Park Estate, in the village of Clonmany. Land cover is predominantly pasture with a large area of peat in the upper reaches (EPA 2016).

The estuary of the Clonmany River at Tullagh Bay falls within the North Inishowen Coast, Special Area of Conservation (SAC).

Inland Fisheries Ireland conducts annual nation-wide fish sampling surveys to assess and report the status of stocks in Ireland's rivers, lakes and transitional waters. This report presents the results of a catchment-wide electro-fishing (CEN 2003) survey, carried out in the Clonmany Catchment over the 2024 season. Eight sites were surveyed in the Clonmany River Catchment between the 4th and 5th of September 2024. One long-term Water Framework Directive (WFD) surveillance monitoring (SM) site was surveyed on the Ballyhallan River upstream of the Clonmany River (Site 8).

The survey methods included 10-minute timed Electro-Fishing (TEF_{10}), and Area Delineated Electro-Fishing (ADEF handset). All TEF_{10} fish count results were converted to minimum population estimates according to Matson *et al.* 2018.

Cloontagh Stream at Cloontagh Bog (Site 1), Co. Donegal.

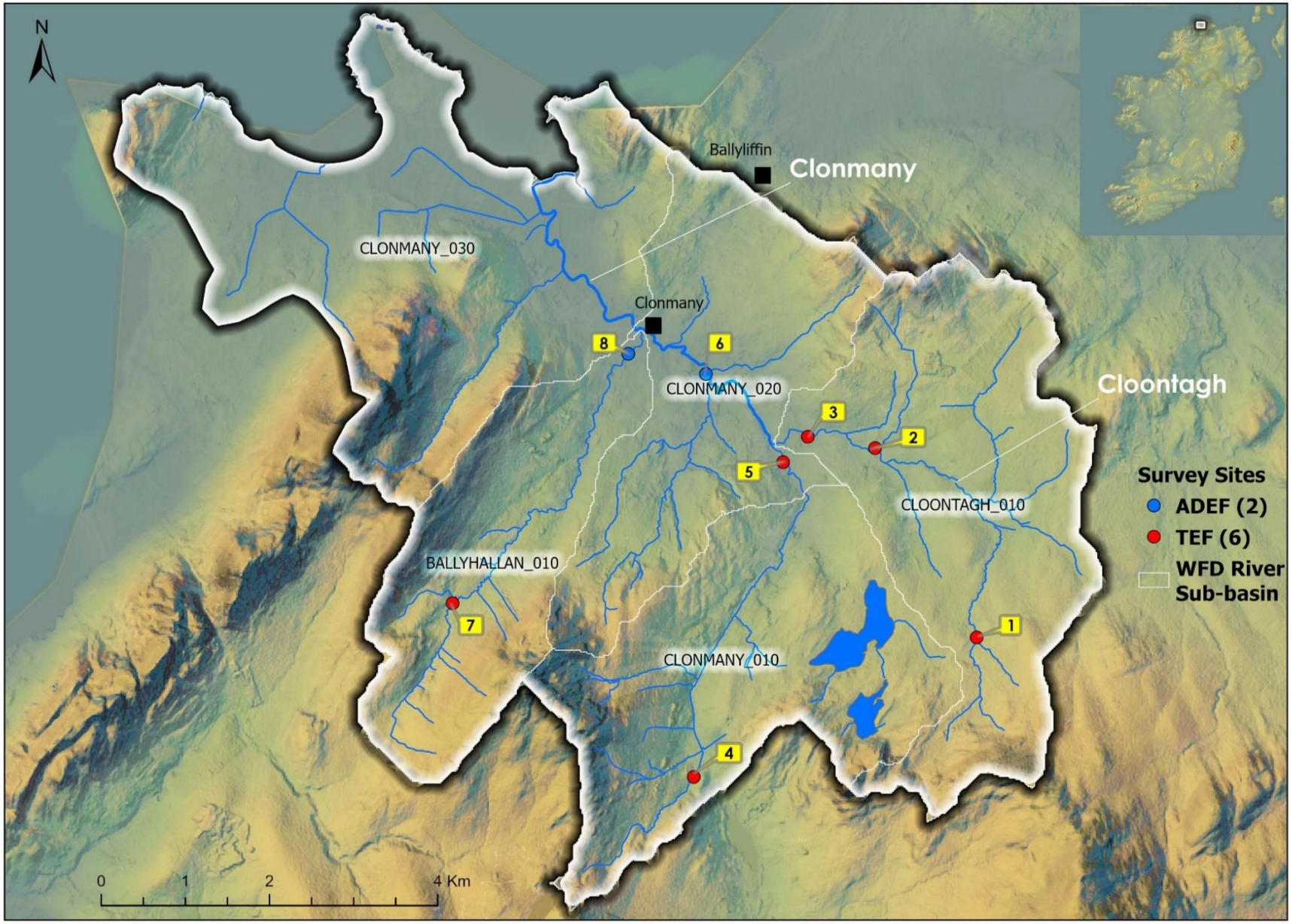

Figure 1. Location of electrofishing survey sites on the Clonmany River catchment, September 2024.

Table 1. Site survey details, Clonmany River Catchment, September 2024.

No.	WFD Sub-basin	River	Site	Method	WFD	Date
Cloontagh sub-catchment						
1	Cloontagh_010	Cloontagh	Cloontagh Bog	TEF (Handset)	No	05/09/2024
2	Cloontagh_010	Cloontagh	Gortaran	TEF (Handset)	No	05/09/2024
3	Cloontagh_010	Cloontagh	Cloontagh	TEF (Handset)	No	04/09/2024
Clonmany sub-catchment						
4	Clonmany_010	Clonmany	Glassmullen	TEF (Handset)	No	05/09/2024
5	Clonmany_020	Clonmany	Jockeys Town	TEF (Handset)	No	05/09/2024
6	Clonmany_020	Clonmany	Cleagh	ADEF (Handset)	No	05/09/2024
Ballyhallan sub-catchment						
7	Ballyhallan_010	Ballyhallan	Effishmore	TEF (Handset)	No	04/09/2024
8	Ballyhallan_010	Ballyhallan	Bridge u/s Clonmany River	ADEF (Handset)	Yes	04/09/2024

Table 2. Minimum density estimates of fish (no. fish/m^2), Clonmany River Catchment, September 2024 (previous results are shown where applicable).

	Cloontagh	Clonmany	Ballyhallan							
Site no.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**		
Species	**2024**	**2024**	**2024**	**2024**	**2024**	**2024**	**2024**	**2011**	**2020**	**2024**
Brown trout	0.218	0.194	0.146	0.241	0.205	0.098	0.245	0.049	0.117	0.193
0+ brown trout	0.049	0.097	0.046	0.220	0.070	0.023	0.095	0.022	0.046	0.044
1+ & older brown trout	0.170	0.097	0.100	0.021	0.134	0.075	0.150	0.027	0.072	0.149
Salmon	-	0.008	0.431	-	-	0.014	-	0.268	-	0.006
0+ salmon	-	0.008	0.431	-	-	0.014	-	0.213	-	-
1+ & older salmon	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.055	-	0.006
European eel	-	0.025	0.046	-	0.019	0.028	-	0.005	0.02	-
All fish	**0.218**	**0.228**	**0.624**	**0.241**	**0.224**	**0.140**	**0.245**	**0.323**	**0.137**	**0.198**

Ballyhallan River at Effishmore, Co. Donegal (Site 7).

Table 3. Brown trout % age class structure (where recorded), Clonmany River Catchment, September 2024.

Site No.	% of catch		
	0+	1+	2+
Cloontagh			
1	23	54	23
2	50	41	9
3	33	67	-
Clonmany			
4	92	8	-
5	37	50	13
6	24	71	5
Ballyhallan			
7	44	56	-
8	33	64	3

Table 4. Salmon % age class structure (where recorded), Clonmany River Catchment, September 2024.

Site No.	% of catch	
	0+	1+
Cloontagh		
2	100	-
3	100	-
Ballyhallan		
7	100	-
8	-	100

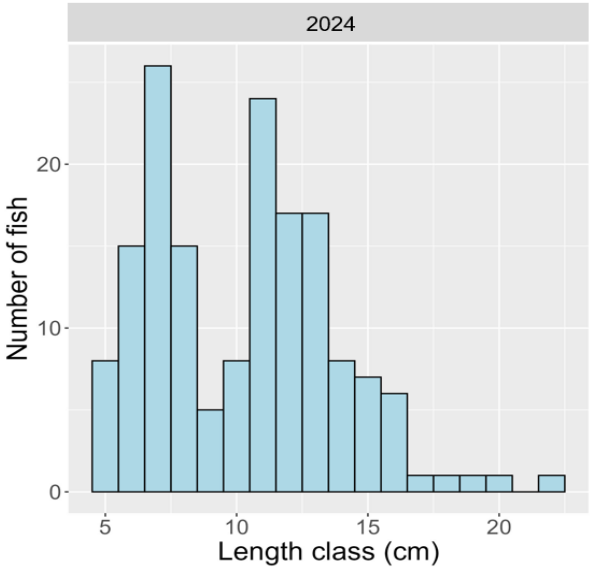

Figure 2. Length frequency distribution for brown trout (n = 161), Clonmany River Catchment, 2024 (n-sites = 8).

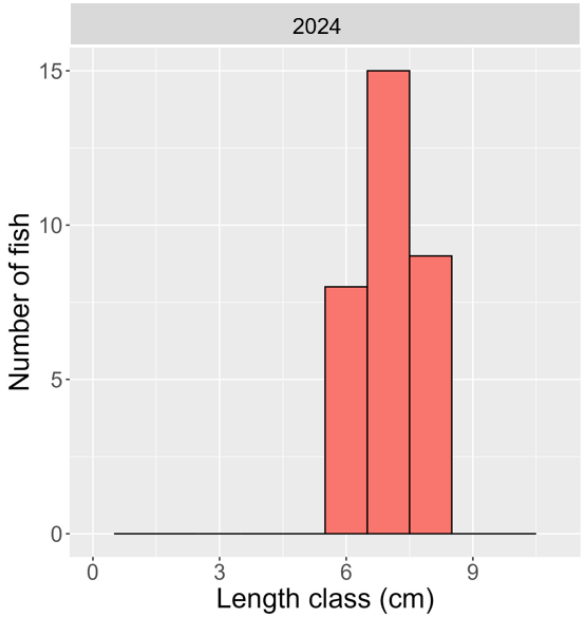

Figure 3. Length frequency distribution for salmon = 33), Clonmany River Catchment, 2024 (n-sites = 4).

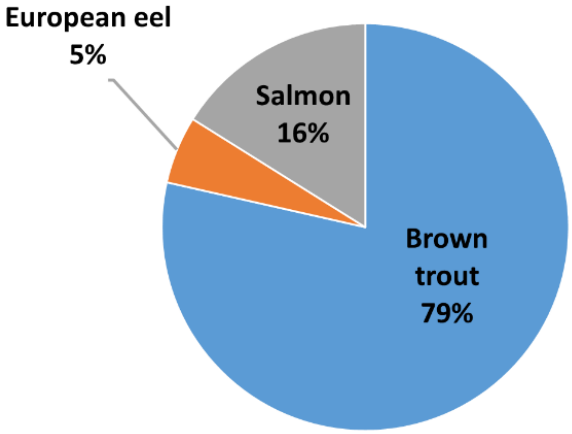

Figure 4. Fish species composition (%), Clonmany Catchment, 2024.

Table 5. Fish ecological status, Clonmany River Catchment, September 2024.

Site no.	2011	2020	2024
Cloontagh sub-catchment			
1	-	-	M
2	-	-	G
3	-	-	G
Clonmany sub-catchment			
4	-	-	M
5	-	-	M
6	-	-	M
Ballyhallan sub-catchment			
7	-	-	M
8	G	M	M

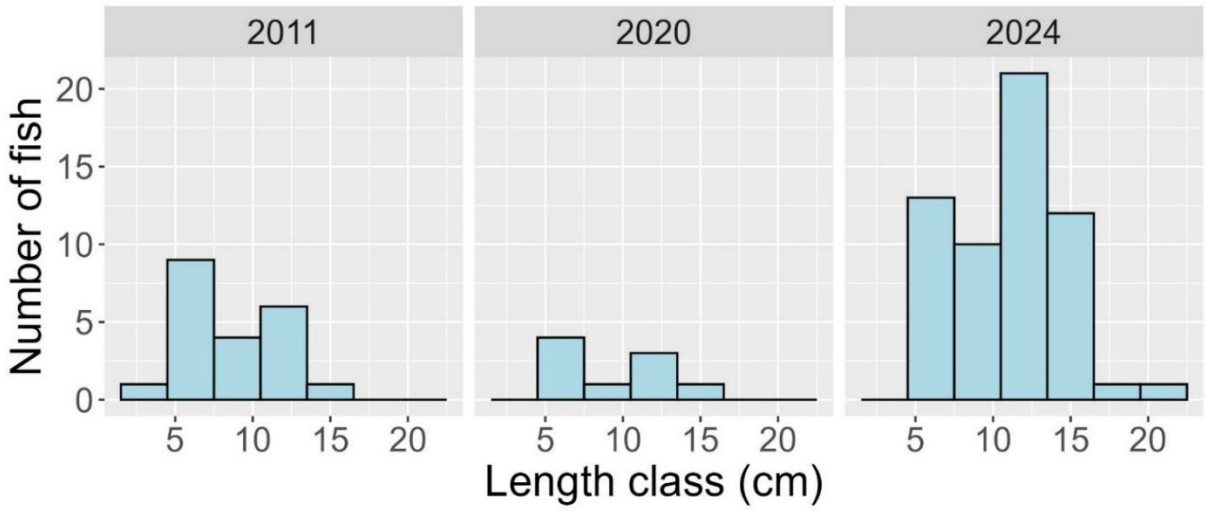

Figure 5. Length frequency distribution of brown trout (2011 n= 21, 2020 n=9, 2024 n=58) at Site 8 (Bridge u/s Clonmany River), a WFD surveillance monitoring site, in the Clonmany River Catchment.

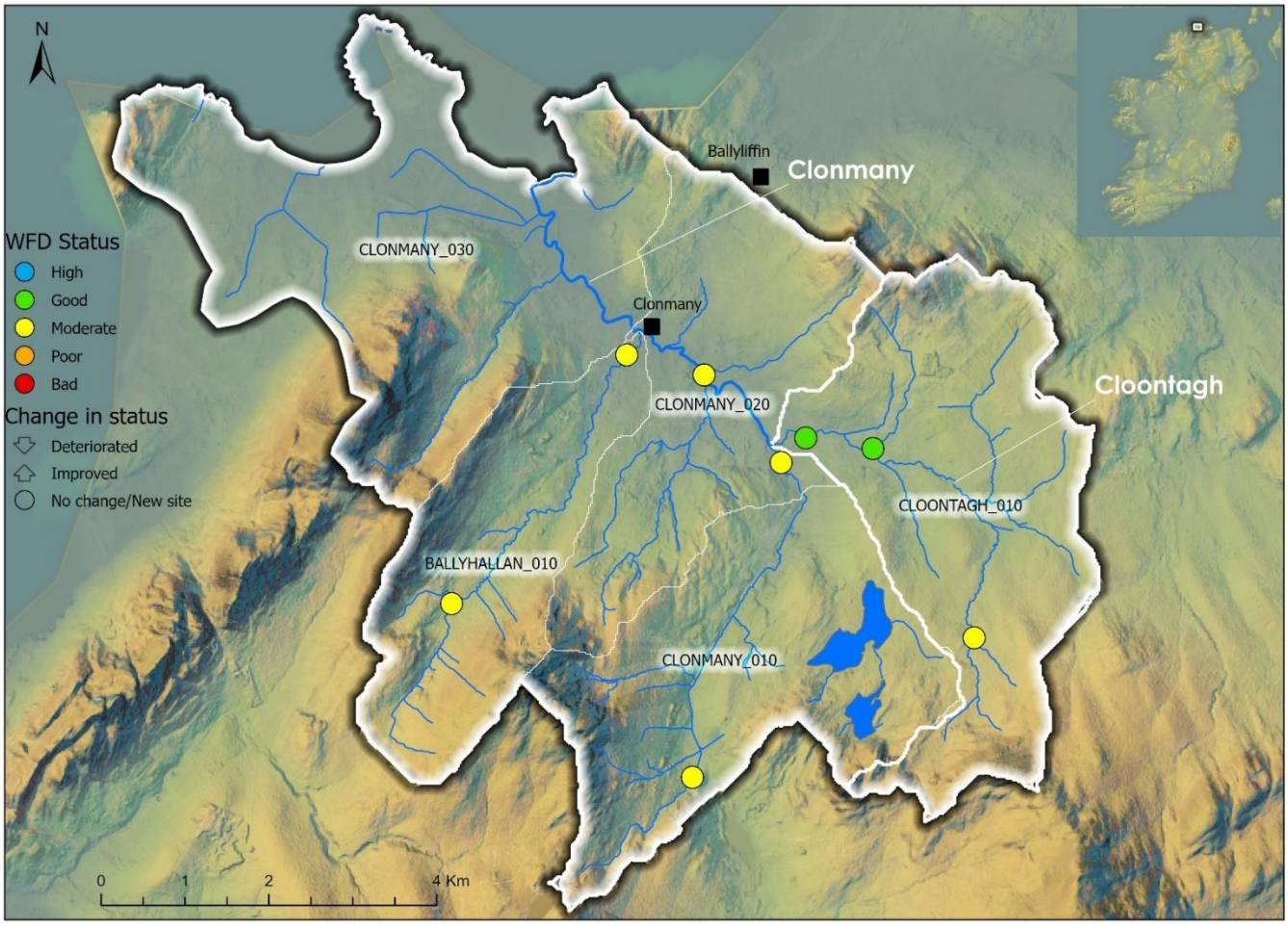

Figure 8. Fish ecological status in the Clonmany River Catchment, 2024. Arrows indicate a change in status since previous surveys (where applicable).

Summary

Three fish species were recorded at eight sites electrofished on the Clonmany River Catchment in September 2024.

Brown trout was the most common species captured (8 sites, 100%), followed by European eel and salmon (four sites each, 50%).

Brown trout was the most abundant species captured, present in all sites followed by salmon, and European eel (Figure 5, table 2).

Brown trout ranged in length from 5.2 to 22.3cm. Three age classes of brown trout (0+, 1+, and 2+) were present with 1+ being the most abundant cohort. The highest density of brown trout (all ages combined) (0.245 fish/m^2) was recorded at Site 7 (Effishmore) in the Ballyhallan River. The highest density of 0+ brown trout (0.220 fish/m^2) was recorded at Site 4 (Glassmullen) in the Clonmany River. The highest density of 1+ and older brown trout (0.170 fish/m^2) was recorded at Site 1 (Cloontagh Bog) in the Cloontagh River.

Salmon ranged in length from 6.1 to 11.7cm. Two age classes for salmon (0+ and 1+) were recorded with 0+ being the most abundant cohort. The highest density of salmon was (all ages combined) (0.431 fish/m^2) was recorded at Site 3 (Cloontagh) in the Cloontagh River. The highest density of 0+ salmon (0.431 fish/m^2) was also recorded at Site 3 (Cloontagh). The highest density of 1+ and older salmon (0.006 fish/m^2) was recorded at Site 8 (Bridge upstream of the Clonmany River) in the Ballyhallan River.

A Water Framework Directive fish classification tool (FCS2) was developed for Irish rivers in 2011 (SNIFFER 2011). The tool works by comparing various fish community metric values within a site to those predicted for a site under un-impacted conditions. In general, a site will achieve High status if all indicator species (e.g. both salmonid cohorts 0+ and 1+ and older) are present and in expected numbers. Status will decline if such cohorts are missing, are in poor abundance, or if more tolerant species proliferate.

Fish ecological status was assigned to eight sites surveyed in the Clonmany Catchment during 2024. Two sites were assigned Good status, with six sites Moderate. One site (Site 8) was surveyed previously on this catchment and assigned fish ecological status. When compared with the most recent previous survey, the status remained unchanged.

The reasons for the failures (i.e. moderate status) in fish ecological status were due to lower-than-expected abundance of type specific indicator species (e.g., salmon and trout), absence of certain age cohorts indicating recruitment failures. Failures and deteriorations in fish ecological status can be caused by pressures such as nutrient enrichment, habitat modification and fish passage issues.

Ballyhallan River upstream of Clonmany River (Site 8), Co. Donegal.

References

CEN (2003) Water Quality Sampling of Fish with Electricity. CEN EN 14011:2000. Brussels. European Committee for Standardization.

Matson, R., Delanty, K., Shephard, S., Coghlan, B. and Kelly, F. (2018). *Moving from multiple pass depletion to single pass timed electrofishing for fish community assessment in wadeable streams*. Fisheries Research, 198, 99-108.

SNIFFER (2011) River Fish Classification Tool: Science Work. WFD68c, Phase 2. Final Report. Version 6. Edinburgh. Scotland and Northern Ireland Forum for Environmental Research.

EPA (2016) https://gis.epa.ie/EPAMaps/Water Catchments.ie – Catchments.ie Accessed in March/April 2025.

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CITATION: Corcoran, W., Gordon, P., McCarthy, E., Flynn, E., O Brian, M., Szocs, A., Robson, S., Piaskowy, J., and Kelly, F.L., (2025) Sampling Fish in Rivers 2024 – Clonmany River Catchment, Factsheet No. 5. National Research Survey Programme. Inland Fisheries Ireland.

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