

Fish in Rivers Factsheet

SWRBD

Ilen River Catchment

Factsheet: 2024/08

The Ilen River Catchment is located within the South Western River Basin District and covers an area of approximately 317 km² in County Cork. The River Ilen is a medium sized spate river and rises in the Mullagmesha mountain, Co. Cork. The river flows in a southerly direction before entering the sea at Skibbereen, Co. Cork. The River Ilen is noted for its excellent salmon and sea trout fishing. The geology of the catchment is comprised of mostly old red sandstone and dinantian mudstone (EPA 2016).

The Ilen River Catchment is one of Inland Fisheries Ireland's index catchments for climate change research. A network of data loggers are deployed across the catchment measuring water temperature every 30 minutes (e.g. Barry *et al.*, 2024).

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 survey of the River Ilen Catchment in 2024. Fifteen sites were surveyed by electro-fishing (CEN, 2003) on the Ilen catchment between the 23rd and the 26th of September 2024.

The survey methods included 10-minute timed Electro-Fishing (TEF₁₀), and Area Delineated Electro-Fishing (ADEF handset). All TEF₁₀ fish count results were converted to minimum population estimates according to Matson *et al.* (2018).



Ilen River at Dromoureen, Co. Cork (Site 1).



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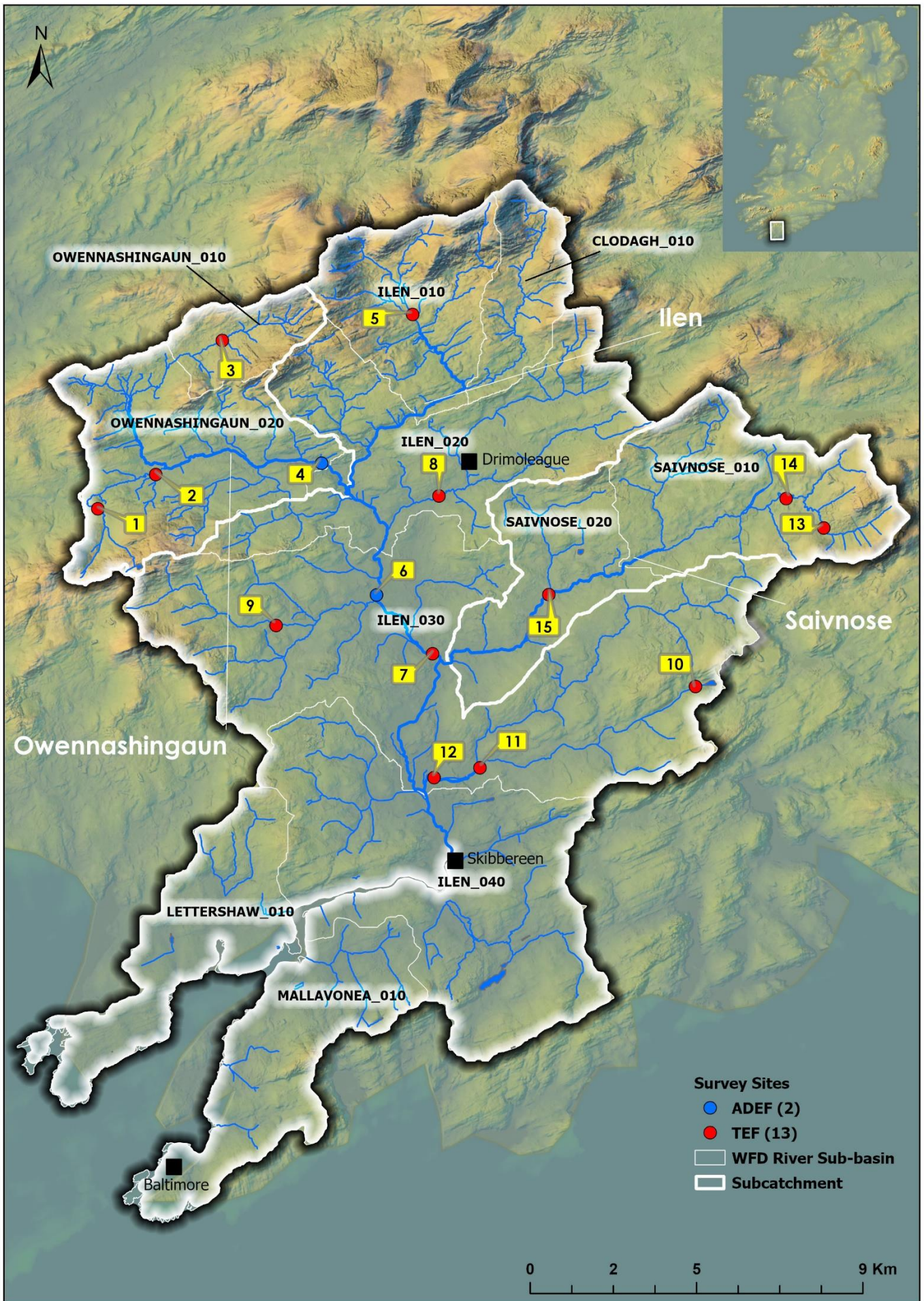


Figure 1. Location of electrofishing survey sites on the Ilen River catchment, September 2024.

Table 1. Site survey details, Ilen River catchment, September 2024.

No.	WFD Sub-basin	River	Site	Method	WFD	Date
Owennashingaun sub-catchment						
1	Owennashingaun_020	Coomnagoragh	Dromoureen	TEF (Handset)	No	26/09/2024
2	Owennashingaun_020	Coomnagoragh	Cullomane Crossroads	TEF (Handset)	No	24/09/2024
3	Owennashingaun_010	Owennashingaun	Glandarta Bridge	TEF (Handset)	No	24/09/2024
4	Owennashingaun_020	Owennashingaun	Inchingering Bridge	ADEF (Handset)	No	26/09/2024
Ilen sub-catchment						
5	Ilen_010	Ilen	Castledonavan	TEF (Handset)	No	24/09/2024
6	Ilen_030	Ilen	Madore Bridge	ADEF (Handset)	No	26/09/2024
7	Ilen_030	Ilen	Derreeny	TEF (Handset)	No	26/09/2024
8	Ilen_020	Ruagagh	Garranes Bridge	TEF (Handset)	No	23/09/2024
9	Ilen_030	Glanaphuca	Ballyourane Bridge	TEF (Handset)	No	24/09/2024
10	Ilen_030	Lissalohorig	Downstream Lough Gorm	TEF (Handset)	No	25/09/2024
11	Ilen_030	Lissalohorig	Bunalunn	TEF (Handset)	No	23/09/2024
12	Ilen_030	Ahacrinduff	Hollybrook	TEF (Handset)	No	24/09/2024
Saivnose sub-catchment						
13	Saivnose_010	Saivnose	Coomatallin Bridge	TEF (Handset)	No	25/09/2024
14	Saivnose_010	Saivnose	Drinagh	TEF (Handset)	No	25/09/2024
15	Saivnose_020	Saivnose	300m S of Bredagh Crossroads	TEF (Handset)	No	25/09/2024



Coomnagoragh River at Cullomane Crossroads (Site 2), Co. Cork.

Table 2. Minimum density estimates of fish (no. fish/m²), Ilen River Catchment, September 2024

Owennashingaun					Ilen			
Site no.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Species	2024	2024	2024	2024	2024	2024	2024	2024
Brown trout	0.247	0.422	0.449	0.022	0.504	0.011	0.027	0.084
0+ brown trout	-	0.051	0.112	0.003	0.130	0.006	0.027	0.028
1+ & older brown trout	0.247	0.371	0.337	0.019	0.374	0.006	-	0.056
Salmon	-	-	-	0.051	-	0.074	0.031	0.126
0+ salmon	-	-	-	0.013	-	0.058	0.031	0.056
1+ & older salmon	-	-	-	0.038	-	0.017	-	0.070
European eel	-	-	-	0.006	-	-	-	-
Minnow	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.014
Three-spined stickleback	-	-	-	-	-	0.003	0.012	-
All fish	0.247	0.422	0.449	0.080	0.504	0.088	0.070	0.224
Ilen					Saivnose			
Site no.	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	
Species	2024	2024	2024	2024	2024	2024	2024	
Brown trout	0.574	-	0.566	0.104	0.415	0.383	0.137	
0+ brown trout	0.139	-	0.270	0.010	0.104	0.073	0.008	
1+ & older brown trout	0.435	-	0.296	0.094	0.311	0.310	0.130	
Salmon	-	-	0.180	0.129	-	-	0.099	
0+ salmon	-	-	0.103	0.040	-	-	0.030	
1+ & older salmon	-	-	0.077	0.089	-	-	0.069	
European eel	0.018	-	0.039	-	-	-	-	
Minnow	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.011	
Three-spined stickleback	-	0.408	-	-	-	-	-	
All fish	0.592	0.408	0.784	0.233	0.415	0.383	0.248	

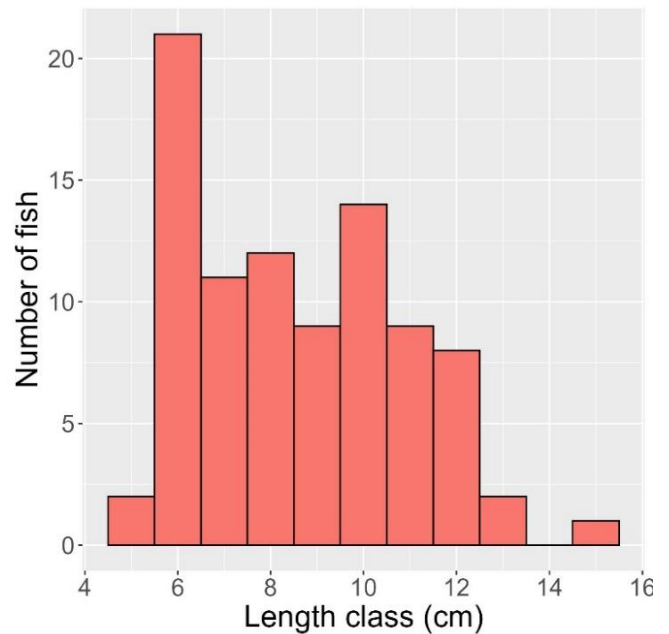
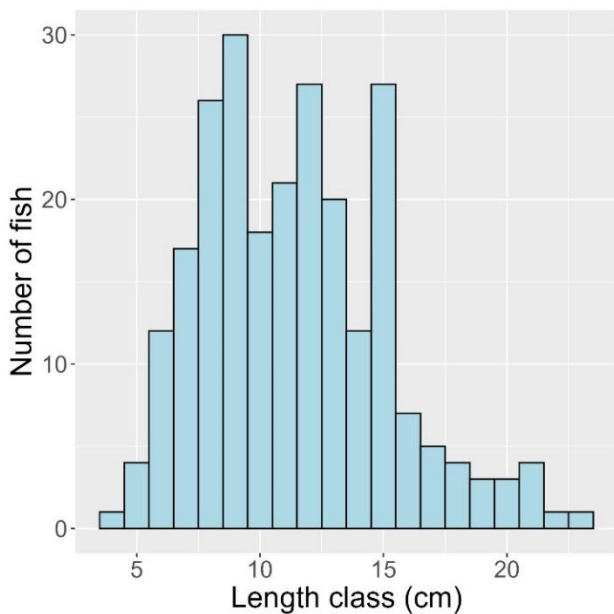


Figure 2. Length frequency distribution for brown trout (n = 243), Ilen River Catchment, 2024 (No. sites = 14).

Figure 3. Length frequency distribution for salmon (n = 243), Ilen River Catchment, 2024 (No. sites = 14).

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

Site No.	% of catch			
	0+	1+	2+	3+
1	-	86	14	-
2	12	67	21	-
3	26	41	33	-
4	14	43	43	-
5	28	63	9	-
6	50	25	25	-
7	100	-	-	-
8	33	33	34	-
9	24	58	18	-
11	48	52	-	-
12	10	80	10	-
13	26	53	16	5
14	20	70	10	-
15	6	76	18	-

Table 4. Salmon % age class structure (where recorded), Ilen River Catchment.

Site No.	% of catch		
	0+	1+	2+
4	14	43	43
6	78	22	-
7	100	-	-
8	44	56	-
11	57	43	-
12	31	69	-
15	31	61	8



Ilen river at Castledonavan (Site 5), Co. Cork.

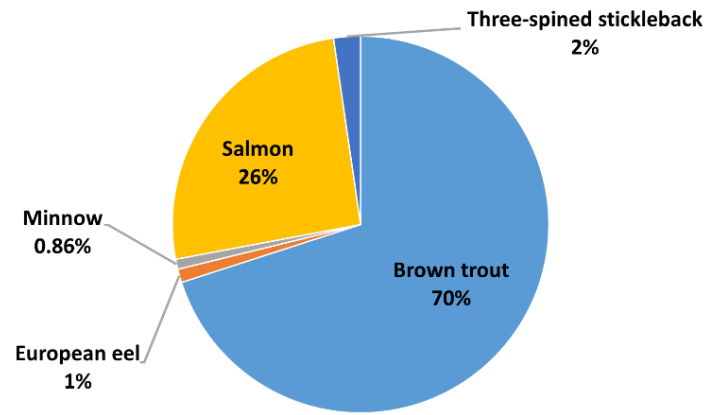


Figure 4. Fish species composition (%), Ilen River Catchment, 2024.

Table 5. Fish ecological status, Ilen Catchment, September 2024.

Site No.	WFD Sub-basin	2024
Owennashingaun		
1	Owennashingaun_020	M
2	Owennashingaun_020	M
3	Owennashingaun_010	G
4	Owennashingaun_020	M
Ilen		
5	Ilen_010	G
6	Ilen_030	M
7	Ilen_030	P
8	Ilen_020	G
9	Ilen_030	G
10	Ilen_030	P
11	Ilen_030	H
12	Ilen_030	M
Saivnose		
13	Saivnose_010	G
14	Saivnose_010	G
15	Saivnose_020	M



Saivnose at Coomatillin Bridge (Site 13), Co. Cork.

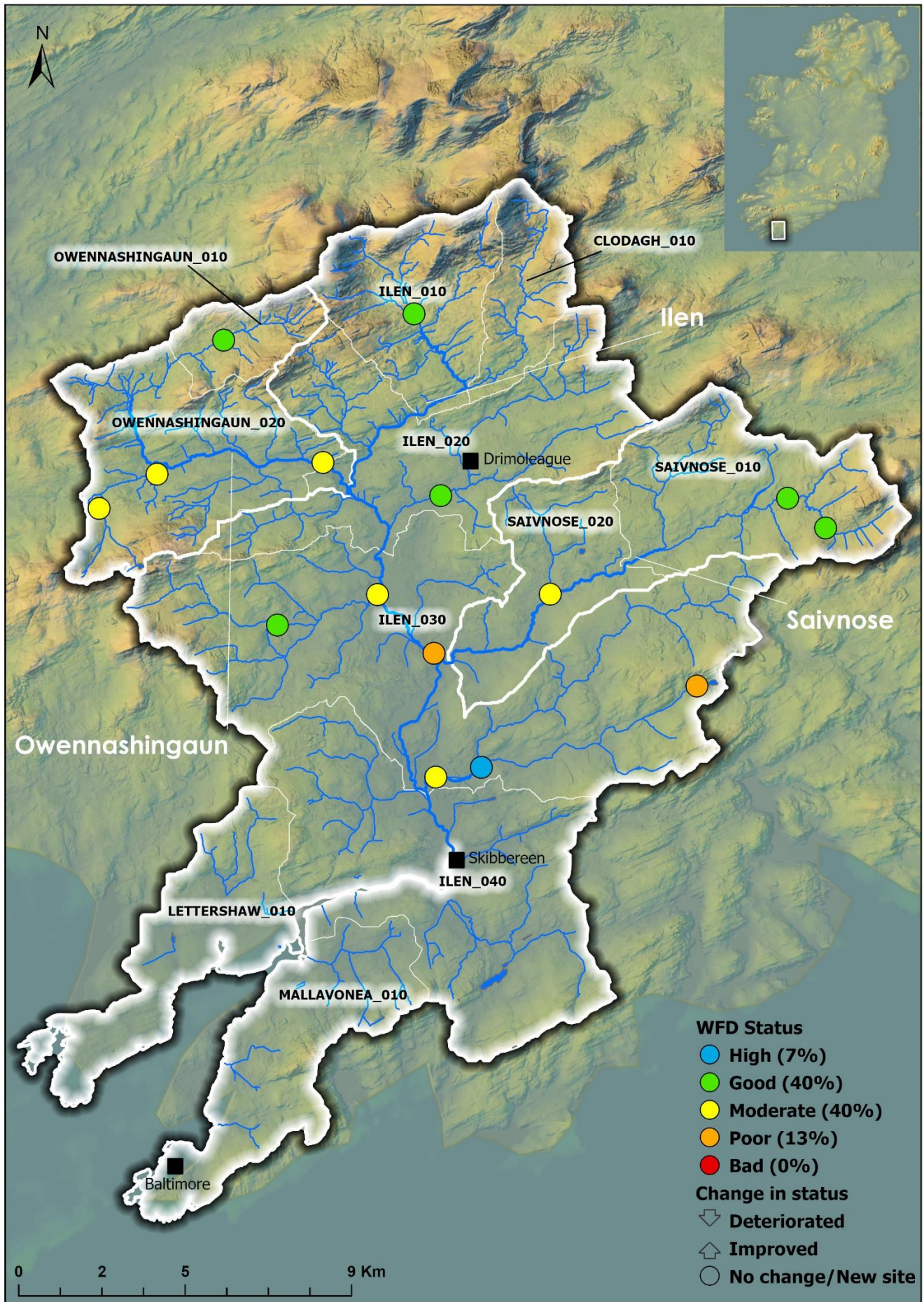


Figure 8. Fish ecological status in the Ilen River Catchment, 2024. Arrows indicate a change in status since previous surveys (where applicable).

Summary

Five fish species were recorded at fifteen sites electrofished on the Ilen River Catchment in 2024.

Brown trout was the most common species present (14 sites, 93%), followed by salmon (7 sites, 46%) three-spined stickleback and European eel (3 sites each, 20%) and minnow (2 sites, 13%) (Table 2, Figure 7).

Brown trout were the most abundant species recorded, followed by salmon, three-spined stickleback, European eel, and minnow (Figure 7).

Brown trout ranged in length from 4.7 to 23.1cm. Four age classes of brown trout were present (0+, 1+, 2+ and 3+), with 1+ being the most abundant cohort. The highest density of brown trout (all ages combined) (0.574 fish/m²) was recorded at Site 9 (Ballyourane Bridge) on the Glanaphuca River. The highest density of 0+ brown trout (0.270 fish/m²) was recorded at Site 11 (Bunalunn) on the Lissalohorig River. The highest density of 1+ and older brown trout (0.435 fish/m²) was also recorded at Site 9.

Salmon ranged in size from 5.2 to 15.4cm. Three age classes for salmon were present (0+, 1+, 2+) with 0+ being the most abundant cohort. The highest density of salmon (all ages combined) (0.180 fish/m²) was recorded at Site 11 (Bunalunn) on the Lissalohorig River. The highest density of 0+ salmon (0.103 fish/m²) was also recorded at Site 11. The highest density of 1+ and older salmon (0.089 fish/m²) was recorded at Site 12 (Hollybrook) on the Ahacrinduff 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 fifteen sites surveyed in the Ilen River Catchment during 2024. One site was assigned High status, with six sites assigned Good status, six sites Moderate and two sites Poor. No sites were surveyed previously on this catchment and assigned fish ecological status.

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.

References

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