Fish in Rivers Factsheet

WRBD **River Easky Catchment** **Factsheet: 2025/07**

The River Easky is located within the Western River Basin District in Co. Sligo and covers an area of approximately of 100km^2. The River Easky originates around Lough Easky in the Ox mountains where the Ox Mountain Bog Special Area of Conservation is located. The River Easky flows in a northerly direction for approximately 29 km through upland bog and rough pasture, before entering the Atlantic Ocean near the Village of Easky. Several tributaries join the River Easky, these include the Gowlan and Buncrowly rivers.

The geology of the catchment is composed of igneous and metamorphic rock in the upper portion of the catchment, which is often blanketed by peat. Limestone dominates the middle and lower portions of the Easky catchment. The primary land uses in the catchment includes forestry on steeper upland slopes and agriculture on low-lying land closer to the mouth of the Easky River (EPA 2021).

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 Easky Catchment over the 2025 survey season. Eight sites were surveyed between the 18th to 20th of August 2025.

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.

Lough Easky Inflow, Co. Sligo (Site 2).

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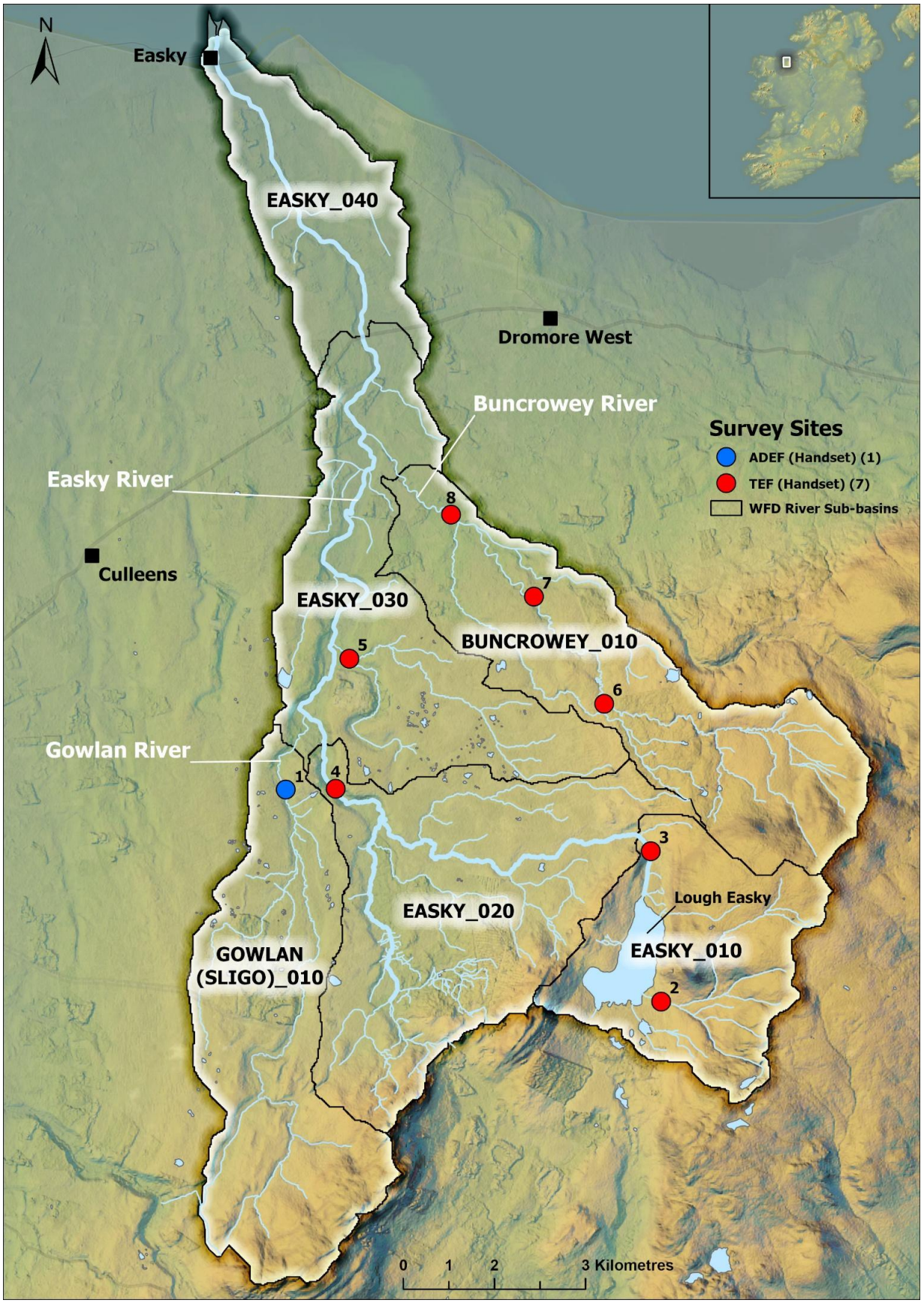

Figure 1. Location of electrofishing survey sites on the River Easky Catchment, 2025. Sub-catchments and WFD sub-basins are also highlighted.

Table 1. Site survey details, River Easky Catchment, 2025.

No.	WFD Sub-basin	River	Site	Method	WFD	Date
Gowlan River sub-catchment						
1	GOWLAN (SLIGO)_010	Gowlan	Track west of Lough Black	ADEF (Handset)	YES	18/08/2025
Easky River sub-catchment						
2	EASKY_010	Easky	Lough Easky inflow	TEF (Handset)	NO	19/08/2025
3	EASKY_010	Easky	Lough Easky outflow	TEF (Handset)	NO	19/08/2025
4	EASKY_020	Easky	Letterunshin bog	TEF (Handset)	NO	20/08/2025
5	EASKY_030	Fiddangarrodey	Griddlestone	TEF (Handset)	NO	20/08/2025
Buncrowey River sub-catchment						
6	BUNCROWEY_010	Buncrowley	Coopers lodge	TEF (Handset)	NO	19/08/2025
7	BUNCROWEY_010	Buncrowley	Crowagh Track	TEF (Handset)	NO	19/08/2025
8	BUNCROWEY_010	Buncrowley	Rathgoonane	TEF (Handset)	NO	20/08/2025

Table 2. Minimum density estimates of fish (no. fish/m^2), Gowlan and Easky River sub-catchments, in the River Easky Catchment, August 2025 (previous results are shown where applicable).

Gowlan River sub-catchment				Easky River sub-catchment	
Site no.	**1**			**2**	**3**
Species	**2012**	**2023**	**2025**	**2025**	**2025**
Brown trout	0.097	0.016	0.080	0.016	0.036
0+ brown trout	0.004	0.008	0.011	0.016	-
1+ & older brown trout	0.093	0.008	0.069	-	0.036
Salmon	0.187	0.036	0.107	0.279	0.274
0+ salmon	0.027	0.004	0.085	0.167	0.119
1+ & older salmon	0.159	0.032	0.021	0.111	0.155
European eel	0.008	0.004	0.005	-	-
Sea trout	0.004	-	0.005	-	-
All fish	**0.295**	**0.056**	**0.197**	**0.294**	**0.310**

Easky River sub-catchment			Buncrowey River sub-catchment		
Site no.	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**
Species	**2025**	**2025**	**2025**	**2025**	**2025**
Brown trout	0.176	0.037	0.086	0.250	0.313
0+ brown trout	0.019	0.037	0.029	0.081	0.151
1+ & older brown trout	0.158	-	0.057	0.170	0.163
Salmon	0.361	0.496	-	0.194	0.639
0+ salmon	0.269	0.202	-	0.081	0.422
1+ & older salmon	0.093	0.294	-	0.113	0.217
European eel	-	-	0.029	0.024	-
All fish	**0.537**	**0.533**	**0.114**	**0.468**	**0.952**

Table 3. Salmonid % age class structure (where recorded), Easky River Catchment, August 2025.

Species	Site No.	% of catch		
		0+	1+	2+
Brown trout	1	10	60	30
	2	100	-	-
	3	-	67	33
	4	11	67	22
	5	100	-	-
	6	40	40	20
	7	37	44	19
	8	50	35	15
Salmon	1	70	30	-
	2	61	39	-
	3	43	57	-
	4	74	26	-
	5	43	57	-
	7	42	58	-
	8	74	26	-

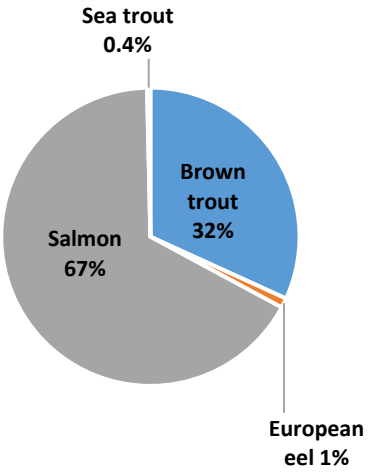

Figure 4. Fish species composition (%), Easky River Catchment, 2025.

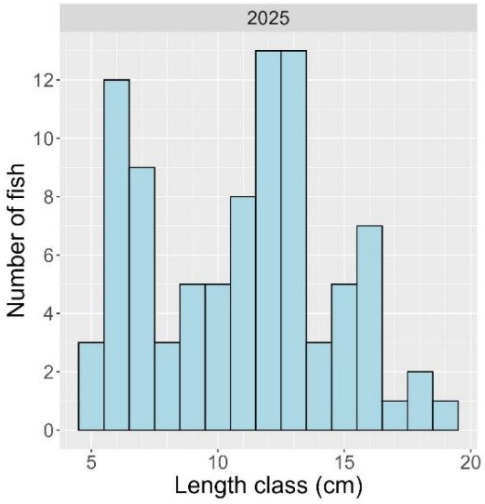

Figure 2. Length frequency distribution for brown trout (n = 90), River Easky Catchment, 2025 (No. sites = 8).

Table 4. Fish ecological status, River Easky Catchment, August 2025.

Site No.	2012	2023	2025
1	G	M	M
2	-	-	G
3	-	-	G
4	-	-	H
5	-	-	M
6	-	-	M
7	-	-	H
8	-	-	H

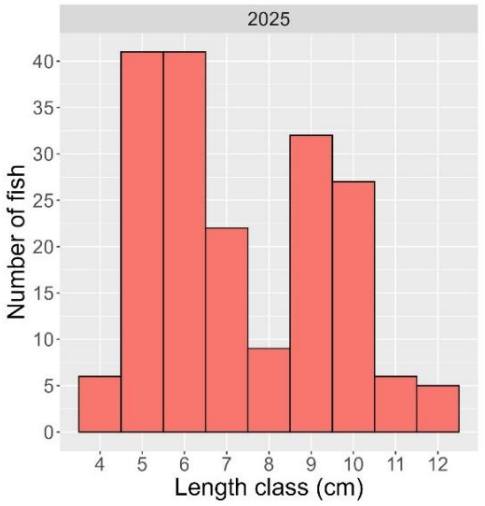

Figure 3. Length frequency distribution for salmon (n =189), River Easky Catchment, 2025 (No. sites =7).

Brown trout captured at the Buncrowey River, Crowagh Track (Site 7).

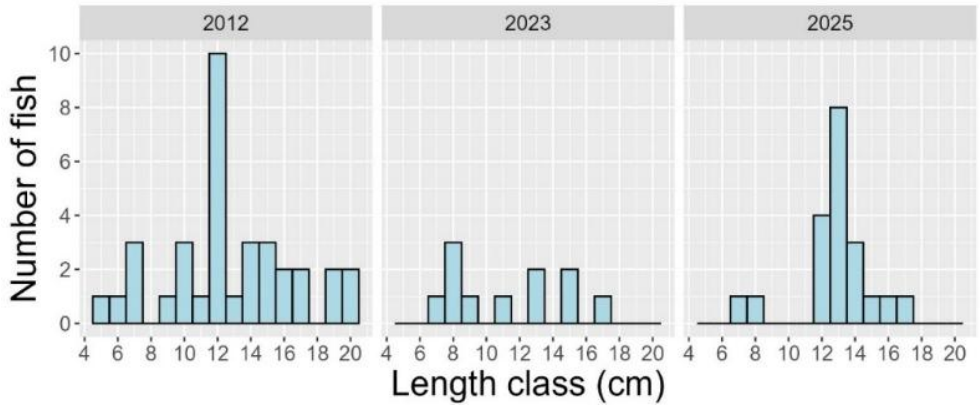

Figure 5. Length frequency distribution of brown trout (2009 n=12, 2012 n=35, 2025 n=20) at Track West of Lough Black (Site 1), a WFD surveillance monitoring site, on the Gowlan River sub-catchment.

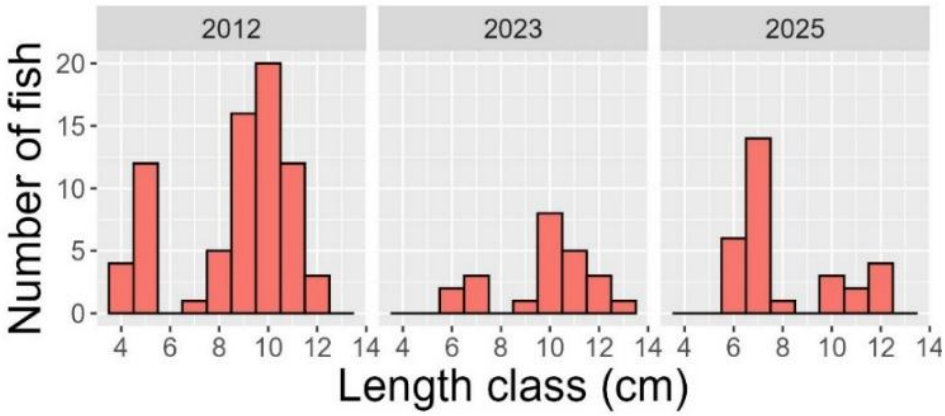

Figure 6. Length frequency distribution of brown trout (2009 n=77, 2012 n=73, 2025 n=30) at Track West of Lough Black (Site 1), a WFD surveillance monitoring site, on the Gowlan River sub-catchment.

Easky River at Lough Easky Outflow, Co. Sligo (Site 3).

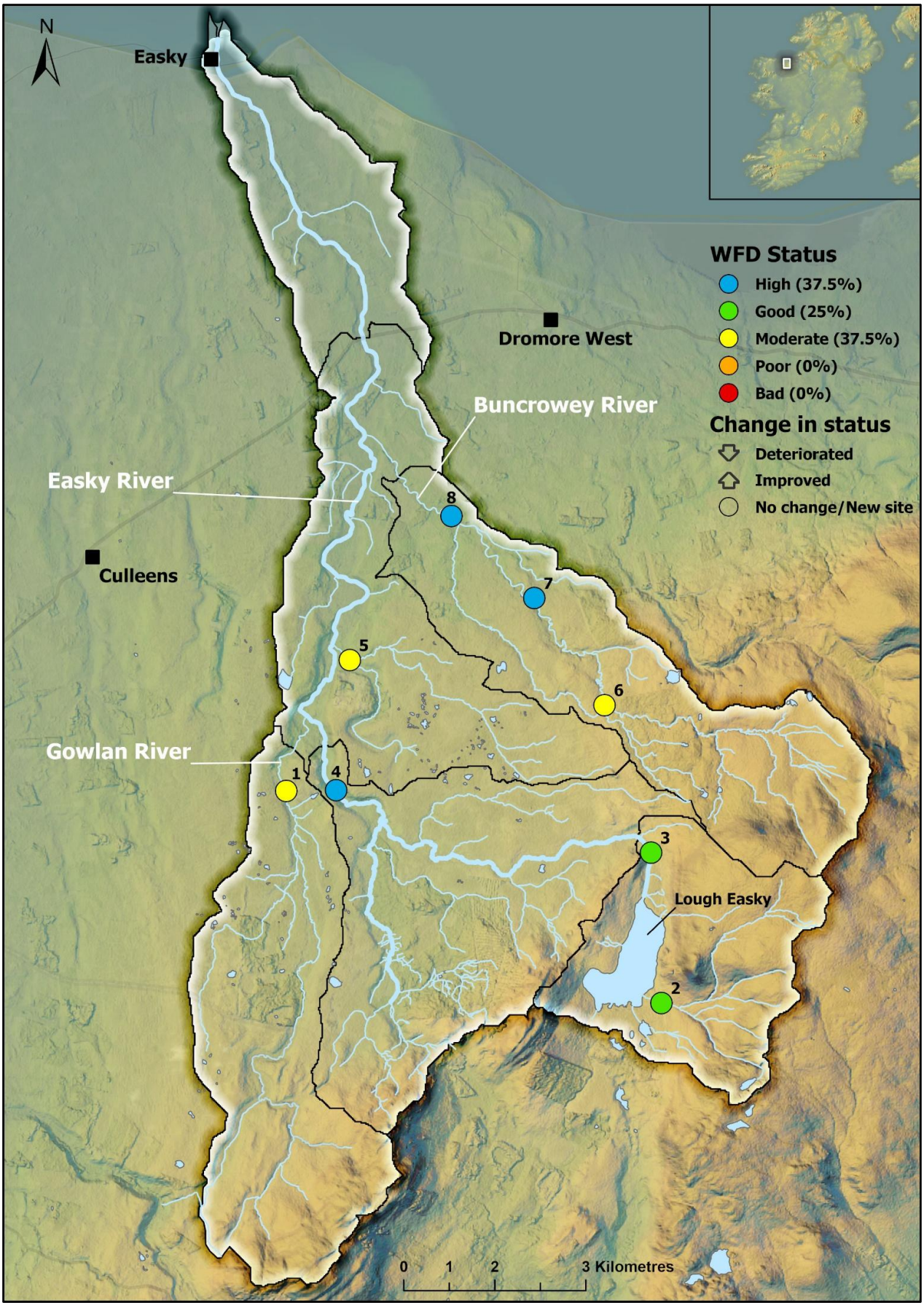

Figure 7. Fish ecological status in the River Easky Catchment, August 2025. Arrows indicate a change in status since previous surveys (where applicable).

Summary

Three fish species and sea trout, a separate 'variety' of trout, were captured at eight sites surveyed in the Easky River Catchment in 2025.

Brown trout was the most common species present (eight sites, 100%), followed by salmon (seven sites, 88%), European eel (three sites, 38%) and sea trout (one site, 13%).

Salmon was the most abundant species recorded, followed by brown trout, European eel and sea trout (Figure 4).

Brown trout ranged in length from 5.7 to 19.8cm (Figure 2). Three age classes were present (0+, 1+ and 2+), with 1+ being the most abundant cohort. The highest density of brown trout (all ages combined) (0.313 fish/m^2) was recorded at Site 8 (Rathgoonane) on the Buncrowey River. The highest density of 0+ brown trout (0.151 fish/m^2) was recorded at Site 8. The highest density of 1+ and older brown trout (0.170 fish/m^2) were recorded at Site 7 (Crowagh Track) on the Buncrowey River.

Salmon ranged in length from 4.2 to 12.6cm (Figure 3). Two age classes were present (0+ and 1+), with 0+ being the most abundant cohort. The highest density of salmon (all ages combined) (0.639 fish/m^2) was recorded at Site 8 (Rathgoonane) in the Buncrowey River. The highest density of 0+ salmon (0.422 fish/m^2) was also recorded at Site 8 (Rathgoonane). The highest density of 1+ and older salmon (0.294 fish/m^2) was recorded at Site 5 (Griddlestone) in the Fiddangarrodey 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 River Easky Catchment during August 2025 (Table 4 and Figure 7). Three sites were assigned High status, two Good and three sites assigned Moderate. One site (Site 1) was surveyed previously on this catchment and assigned fish ecological status. When compared with the most recent previous surveys, this site remained unchanged (Table 4 and Figure 7).

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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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.

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