



# Inland Fisheries Ireland

## Pike Policy

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August 2014





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**Prepared by the Pike Policy Review Group**

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## **Pike Policy Review Group**

### **Management Recommendations**

#### **1. Executive summary.**

Pike are widely distributed in Ireland and are an important component of the national angling resource. Pike thrive in the majority of Irish waters and rapidly establish themselves as the top fish predator. In productive watercourses, pike can grow to 40 lb, although fish of this size are not common. Many waters support good numbers of 10, 20 and even 30 lb pike and these are the principal quarry of the specialist pike angler. Many of these waters are also productive wild brown trout fisheries; trout is a species that can be heavily preyed upon by pike.

IFI formed a group comprising internal and external experts to support the development of a policy on pike. This group would review existing pike policy and make recommendations in respect of new measures that would ensure the conservation of the species, while also protecting the broader aquatic resource. The policy group consulted broadly with pike, trout and coarse angling clubs and federations, and with a diversity of interested stakeholder groups. Based on discussions with the above groups, the best available scientific advice and following the best precautionary principles, the expert policy group put forward recommendations to ensure the best management of pike in Irish waters into the future.

#### **2. Scope and objectives.**

The Pike Policy Review Group was charged with developing policy that would ensure the conservation and protection of pike and their aquatic habitat, while also facilitating long-term sustainable social and economic value for all stakeholders. The policy aimed to follow the best precautionary principles while being cognisant of enhancing and conserving the environment for all species.

The group would consider the development of policies for the management and development of pike angling, in addition to the conservation and protection of pike. Towards this end, the expert group considered all substantive issues relating to pike, associated species (primarily brown trout) and the aquatic habitat. The group confined its deliberations to the development of policy and not to matters relating to its implementation.



### **3. Policy development process.**

The procedure on policy development is laid down by IFI. It is a very broad consultative process involving a wide diversity of stakeholders – IFI senior management, the Board of IFI, management personnel in DCENR, the National Inland Fisheries Forum and statutory consultees. It is intended that any document produced would be subject to review after three years.

The policy group consisted of seven members Dr Joe Caffrey (IFI Swords) who acted as chairperson, John Chambers and John Crudden (both IFPAC), Michael Callaghan (NARA), Josie Mahon (IFI Blackrock), Liam Gavin (IFI Galway) and Mark Corps (IFI Swords). Sandra Doyle provided the secretariat services to the committee.

The group met on four occasions between October 2011 and February 2012.

### **4. Group terms of reference.**

A broad range of issues that might affect or influence policy development for pike were discussed by the group. These included the following:

- Best practice internationally.
- Irish and European legislation relating to this area.
- Existing legislation in this area.
- Corporate and other governance issues of relevance.
- The role of the private sector in the development of this resource.

While the meetings were confidential, it was deemed prudent, in certain circumstances and in respect of certain issues, to seek the input of external committee executives or other interested parties. Only when the review group agreed that this was worthwhile or, indeed, necessary, was permission to consult with these groups granted.

### **5. Policy recommendations.**

The policy recommendations that follow were considered by the review group to be central policy issues that should be formalised by IFI. They aim to provide a framework on which to base sound and informed management of pike in Ireland into the future.

#### **5.1 General.**

1. IFI should recognise pike as an integral part of Ireland's freshwater biodiversity resource.
2. IFI should recognise pike as a valuable component of the national angling asset and as an important socio-economic driver in the country.



## **5.2 Pike distribution.**

1. IFI should compile a comprehensive database that will inform about the detailed distribution of pike in waters throughout Ireland. It is important that details on waters that currently support pike populations and those that do not currently harbour any pike is available. The database should be updated on an ongoing basis.

## **5.3 Marketing of pike angling.**

This group acknowledges the value the socio economic study of recreational angling has placed on angling in Ireland. As a follow on from such an exercise, the group feel that, in relation pike angling the study will inform future decisions on the protection, conservation, management and promotion of this and other species in this country. Specifically, it is recommended that:

1. Fisheries in Ireland should be marketed according to their angling potential, without compromising their primary management practices.
2. A greater marketing effort should be focused on pike angling in order to fully exploit the socio-economic potential of this species in Ireland. This should specifically include the promotion of junior and female pike angling while also recognising the importance of newer angling methods, such as fly fishing for pike. The latter represents an ever-increasing market in Europe and the USA.
3. Any Irish watercourse that regularly produces pike in excess of 1 metre in length should be actively promoted by IFI and Failte Ireland as a specimen pike fishing venue.

## **5.4 Management of pike in designated managed wild brown trout fisheries.**

Pike management is currently operated by IFI in a small number of designated, managed wild brown trout fisheries in Ireland. These include Loughs Corrib, Mask, Carra, Conn, Cullin, Arrow and Sheelin, and a limited number of river catchments. Research conducted by IFI scientists in the past indicated that pike removal from waters such as Loughs Ennell, Owel and Derravarragh was deemed unnecessary at this time and, as a consequence, these operations were terminated.

Pike management in these waters currently involves the removal of pike by netting and/or electric fishing. In addition, under Section 59 of the Fisheries Act, IFI is permitted to authorise designated angling clubs to fish for and kill pike that are caught during permitted angling competition on specified watercourses.

In respect of pike management in designated managed wild brown trout fisheries, the review group recommends the following:

1. The selection of waters on which annual pike management operations will be conducted in the future will be informed by best available scientific advice. Any proposed changes from the current list of waters scheduled for pike control will be discussed with relevant stakeholders.



2. As part of ongoing IFI pike management programmes, all pike greater than or equal to 85 cm in fork length that are captured will be returned alive to the water from which they were taken.
3. The 85 cm size limit will be reviewed by IFI scientists, in consultation with the relevant stakeholders, after three years of operation. If it is considered at that time that the change in size limit has adversely affected resident wild brown trout stocks, an adjustment to the 85 cm size limit will be recommended.
4. Healthy pike of less than 85 cm that are captured during pike management programmes in these designated brown trout fisheries will be transferred to suitable recipient waters. Where possible, these waters should be within the same geographical area in order to reduce the stress imposed on the pike by the transportation process and in order to reduce costs associated with the operations. Only pike that are deemed to be in good physical condition will be transferred. Those pike that are not sufficiently healthy to survive the transfer operation will be euthanized.
5. Where trout angling clubs are permitted by IFI to assist in pike management programmes (i.e. to catch pike on rod and line) in specified waters, IFI will provide, or support the provision of, facilities to ensure that rod-caught pike of less than or equal to 85 cm will be transferred to suitable recipient waters.

### **5.5 Recommended legislative change.**

Conservation of Pike Bye-Law No. 805 (2006) prohibits the killing of any pike greater than 50 cm in length.

1. It is recommended that, in designated managed wild brown trout fisheries, the current bye-law be amended to prohibit the killing of any pike greater than or equal to 85 cm in length. All larger rod-caught pike will be returned to the water alive. In all other waters of the State an angler will be permitted to take and kill one pike of less than or equal to 50 cm in length (as per the existing bye-law).
2. It is recommended that a media campaign to announce the changes to the existing bye-law should be mounted and appropriate signage erected at key pike angling venues.
3. It is recommended that any S59 authorisations to kill pike during angling competitions on specified wild brown trout fisheries will be considered on a case by case basis and any pike caught over 85cm will be released back into the waters.

### **5.6 Research programmes.**

1. A list of watercourses that are suitable to receive pike from IFI pike management operations should be formulated by IFI. This list will be informed by IFI fish stock survey data.



2. It is recommended that targeted research on the efficacy of pike transfer programmes be conducted and that studies commence as soon as practicable. Research that has been conducted by IFI to quantitatively evaluate the efficacy of pike transfer operations (in respect of overall survival, growth, sustainability and catchability of transferred pike) has been inconclusive to date. Studies should be conducted in Cloondroon Lake, which has received significant numbers of netted and tagged pike from Lough Carra over the last number of years, and in Loughs Sheever and Slevens, where tagged pike from Lough Sheelin were introduced in 2011. Further such programmes should be conducted in 2013, as resources permit.

### **5.7 Biosecurity.**

All anglers should strictly adhere to biosecurity protocols, both pre- and post- all angling sessions, in order to ensure that no invasive species and harmful fish pathogens are introduced or spread within the country.

1. Best biosecurity practice guidelines for anglers, and other key stakeholder groups, have been produced by IFI (see [www.fisheriesireland.ie](http://www.fisheriesireland.ie)) and these should be circulated widely among key stakeholder groups.
2. Because of the seriousness of the risk associated with invasive species and fish pathogens, it is recommended that strict adherence to these guidelines should be made a condition of membership of all angling clubs and Federations.
3. It is further recommended that information boards and facilities to disinfect angling tackle and protective clothing should be provided at all major air and sea ports in Ireland. It should also be mandatory for anglers travelling from abroad to show proof that their tackle (including nets, pike sacks, stink bags and protective footwear) has been disinfected prior to entering the country. Failing this, the tackle must be disinfected at the point of entry into the country.
4. International collaboration in respect of biosecurity matters must be encouraged.
5. In order to ensure that no invasive species or fish pathogens are transferred with the pike or the transfer water during IFI pike transfer operations, a best practice guide for moving fish from one watercourse to another has been produced by IFI and it is recommended that this be adhered to during all such operations.

### **5.8 Handling and conservation of pike.**

The review group endorsed the 'Pike (*Esox lucius*) Handling and Conservation' leaflet that was produced by IFI and agreed that it provided comprehensive information on both angling and handling methods for pike anglers. The review group recommends that:



1. This leaflet should be advertised by IFI and copies should be circulated widely among the domestic and visiting pike angling community.
2. Angling clubs and Federations should urge their members to carefully read the leaflet and to strictly adhere to the advice given.
3. This same practice should also be adopted by pike angling competition organisers to minimise pike mortality or damage caused to hooked pike during these events.

### **5.9 Angler contribution.**

1. It is the view of the review group that anglers should contribute towards the protection, management, development and promotion of angling and the aquatic environment in Ireland. It is recommended, however, that the mechanism(s) whereby this contribution will be gathered should be explored by a group or forum separate from the current Policy Review Groups.
2. The idea of creating a National Angler Registration Scheme is one that was well received within the Pike Policy Review Group.

### **5.10 Authorised persons.**

The review group recognises that there is an issue with increased levels of illegal activity specifically relating to the killing of pike, in breach of the Conservation of Pike Bye-law No. 805 (2006). This is a countrywide problem, although certain geographical areas are targeted more than others. The committee recommends that:

1. IFI senior management investigate methods of dealing with the illegal killing of pike (and other fish species) and develop and implement an appropriate plan to address the problem, with relevant stakeholders.

### **5.11 Littering.**

The review group recognises that the riparian habitat associated with our lakes, rivers and canals is an integral part of the fishery ecosystem and its status can significantly influence not only the productivity of the watercourse but also the experience felt by the angler. The review group recognises that there is a significant problem with littering and that this can act as a deterrent to angling. The review group recommends that:

1. IFI, in cooperation with other relevant State agencies, assist in the maintenance of these riparian habitats in order to ensure that biodiversity is enhanced, invasive species are discouraged and/or eliminated and ready and safe access for anglers is maintained.



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