

The Ghillies Seminar

Friday 22nd April 2016

Shona Marshall (West Sutherland Fisheries Trust) – Conservation Limits

The relevance of the new legislation to the different parts of the area was explained. The method of calculating the conservation limits was also explained, together with an explanation of where the figures used were derived from. The ability to refine the model was highlighted and the potential changes in data collection by all present to help in making the model as accurate as possible was noted. In particular, the ability of the angler to address the issues of 'grilse error' and 'egg deposition' through changes in the way they record data.

The model has been devised on the information available. While we can ask why more detailed information is not available for Scotland, that doesn't move us forward and we need to start collecting data that will help to improve the assumptions.

SY asked about getting habitat data into the model. This is the kind of data that is needed, while habitat improvements will help to recover the stocks. It was emphasised that the model will be run annually and reviewed in the light of new information.

RB asked about spawning areas, which he felt were as good as ever. He feels that the problems are elsewhere and therefore we can't alter things. Many problems are at sea but there have been small detrimental changes in habitat within the freshwater. There is always room for improvement. We also need to make sure that the data feeding into the model is the best we can make it.

KD asked about exploitation rates. The use of counter data was explained. The proportion of fish caught compared to those passing through the counter was taken as the exploitation rate. There are 4 counters used within the process and the average of these was used. Annual variations were taken into account by calculating the exploitation rate on an annual basis.

GL raise the issue of catch versus fishing effort, feeling that this should be incorporated into the data. Others mentioned that this would be difficult to work out as it is not simply effort, but fishing quality/experience that makes a difference. The argument is that the catch statistics were used as these were the only data available. There is some argument about this, but the truth is that we need to start improving the model now.

GL asked why only 4 counters were used, the Helmsdale being one that was missed. It was noted that the Helmsdale is a private counter, but also that the position of the counter in the catchment is important. It needs to be as close to the mouth of the river as possible.

PH asked where the nearest counter on the west was. Money should be put into counters where they count, rather than running models based on poor data. This is

the Awe. While agreeing that the model is being run with poor data, this emphasises the importance of getting data to feed into it.

RW noted that there are a number of sub-groups being set up by MSS to improve the model. They are receptive, and we are looking at other data that might be suitable, e.g. juvenile densities.

Charles Allen (Marine Scotland Health) Biosecurity, in mind

“Biosecurity is a state of mind, not something you do”

There were a variety of different examples presented to highlight how doing something for good reasons is not necessarily the best.

A man who bought a lobster at a restaurant in order to release it into the Clyde was hailed as a hero in the Press. Unfortunately this was a non-native American lobster, which can carry pathogens that kill the native European lobster. While it is unlikely that this act would result in the loss of lobster from the Clyde it is possible. While done with the best of intentions, this could have had unforeseen consequences.

Pictures of a large fish kill in the Great Lakes were shown. This was caused by the VHS virus, which while present in the UK is of a different genotype. The sight of millions of dead fish highlights the need to be vigilant when introducing fish or gametes from the States.

Gyrodactylus salaris is present in the Baltic States. It was introduced into Norway from Sweden through a restocking programme. In an effort to improve the fish stocks of the area, many populations suffered a catastrophic decline. It was noted that juvenile populations were declining, but the cause wasn't understood, even though they knew the parasite was there. Over 40 rivers were infected, and it has taken over 20 years and £20 million + to clear the parasite from some rivers. This is undertaken by poisoning the river from source to sea.

Mink, well known to many, were introduced for farming. They escaped, or were released – again with the best of intentions- and are now causing problems for both fish and ground nesting birds.

Top-mouthed gudgeon were introduced for the ornamental trade. Kept with other fish, they were introduced to stocked waters by accident. Prolific breeders, they are now the main catch for many anglers. In England they are being culled out, once again using poison.

Pike were introduced to the sport fishery in America. They out-competed all predators and bred quickly. Now viewed as a major pest, poison is being used to control them.

Genetics are also being looked at now. If individual populations are genetically diverse and unique, should we be introducing fish from other areas?

How to stop the spread?

If carrying out stocking programmes – what is the health status of the population being used? Perhaps best to source from as close to home as possible.

Bait fishing – don't use live bait, this was the source of minnows in this area. Dead bait also has problems. Often of marine origin, it can allow the transfer of pathogens.

Angling equipment – some pathogens exist on damp equipment. The Norwegians have a rigorous disinfection procedure to control the spread.

Water sport equipment – while low risk, it is still a significant source of pathogen movement.

Some rivers use a declaration form for all anglers. This brings the risks to the front of everyone's mind and helps to determine the potential source of our anglers.

Disinfection

Primarily for *Gyrodactylus* – heat, cold and desiccation work; for pathogens, use chemical means at low concentrations (1 – 2%)

DP What is the effect of salt? Usually for *Gyrodactylus*, use a 3% concentration. Chemicals (including salt) will have little effect on fishing gear, but can be rinsed in freshwater afterwards.

KD What would be the effect of escaped farmed fish? Populations will remove the genetic impact of occasional exposure to farmed genes. However, a large escape on a depleted stock or constant infection will result in introgression.

Duncan Pepper (Angling Guide) – Best practice catch and release

There are many reasons for the decline in fish populations since the 1950's, including over-exploitation in the past. However, it is important to remember that dead fish don't spawn. While some clients might be put off by catch and release, others are put off by the keeping of fish. This can be seen on Facebook, where abuse is received for photos of dead or badly handled fish.

There are a number of 'Dos' and 'Don'ts' to catch and release:

DO

- Prepare for your trip properly, with suitable equipment
- Minimise the fight time
- Use a rubber meshed net – kinder to the fish
- Keep the fish and net in the water while preparing for a photo – the head and gills in the water will allow the fish to breathe
- Wet hands before touching fish, and cool them down – thermal shock can kill, and the removal of protective slime is bad
- Use 2 hands to support the fish if you lift it – particularly large fish can be damaged if held wrongly
- Remove the fly with pliers
- Take photos holding the fish over the water

- Support the fish until it's strong – face the head upstream so that water flows through the mouth and over the gills
- Pliers and camera – keep in the same place so that they are easily found when required

DON'T

- Play for too long
- Hold a fish by its gills
- Keep it out of the water for more than a few seconds
- Put fish on the ground – although an un-hooking mat is kind to the fish
- Squeeze the fish

Single and barbless hooks are best. It is possible to cut off extra hooks (from a treble for example) and flatten the barbs. However, there is an article in Trout & Salmon showing the benefits of 'micro-trebles'. This shows a doubling of the number of fish landed when using the tiny trebles, but must be very small.

About 3-5% of smolts return as adults – it is up to us what we do, either demise or recovery. While there are a lot of different issues, this is something we can do.

As a photograph will be the only trophy of the fish, we need to try and get it right. A few pointers were given:

- Get the source of the light behind you
- Hands must look wet
- Have an uncomplicated background
- Tuck those fingers in – we want to see the fish!
- Support the fish right
- Stop shaking

Pointers were then given on the identification of farmed and wild salmon. In the main, the best identifying feature is the front edge of the pectoral fin. In farmed fish this can look wavy, and be bumpy and irregular to the feel. On a wild salmon this would be straight and uniform, and not usually as thick. However, it's best to check both sides of the fish because it's always possible that a wild fish could have had an accident. If both pectorals have an irregular front edge - it's farmed for sure.

A ragged dorsal is not an identifying feature for a farmed fish alone, as this can sometimes happen to wild fish, particularly in areas of high sea-lice. If however you see that both pectorals have an irregular front edge and the fins look a bit ragged - it's a farmed fish.

There are usually 3-6 spots between the back edge of the gill cover and the start of dorsal in wild fish. However, this will average about 17 on Norwegian farmed strains.

Shortened gill covers and snout defects are much more prevalent in farmed fish and a good guide.

GL Are cotton gloves good for fish handling? No

KD What is the post-release survival for fresh fish compared to stale? Springers are most sensitive, while fresh fish are most sensitive than stale due to the leathery skin of stale fish. However, survival rates are good if catch and release is done well.

RB There is a Russian video where fish were tagged before release. This showed that all survived.

RB Have farmed salmon been caught in Greenland? This is unknown, but SM reported that tagged farmed salmon released from Ardmair were mainly located in Norway.

NC asked what the attitude of clients was to C & R. Most of his clients are American, and therefore accustomed to it. However, most understand the need for this measure, for example, on the Dee there is 100% C&R but the river is booked for the whole season.

RW noted that bleeding fish quite often survive, and this has been shown through tagging.

DP stated that fish should always be given time to recover, rather than knocked on the head. One ghillie built a cradle of rocks for a fish and left it. It recovered, after a long period of time. (SM note: in mandatory C&R area, all fish must be returned to the water)

Alan Wells (Marine Scotland) – Wild Fisheries Reform

The consultation was introduced the audience. Very few had seen it or were aware of it.

The proposals are being taken in conjunction with the industry. There is a Stakeholder Reference Group, which have met every 6 weeks for over 1 year so far.

This is the 2nd Consultation, with the 2015 one covering the broad process. There were 200 responses to this, with a total of 35 meetings and 9 drop-in events held around the country.

There is a Wild Fisheries Strategy, which sets out the long term vision and methodologies to be used. It has 4 themes: Protect & Grow; Science & Research; Partnership & Engagement; Promotion

The aim is to move the legislation forward and address the issues identified in the Thin Review. However it must be noted that this is draft provisions and not the complete Bill. Several things are under development, particularly the offences and enforcement powers, being developed in conjunction with the Bailiffs development group.

The 1st part sets out the framework for the relationship between Scottish Ministers and local management. It details the powers and responsibilities of the Scottish Ministers, describes the Fishery Management Organisations (FMO's) and the governance needs of the organisations. It is a Plan-led approach to management.

Part 2 is the regulatory framework. Much of the proposal is not new, simply consolidating existing powers and simplifying the legislation. There have been a lot of comments received to date concerning the proposal to make it a criminal offence to fish without permission for all species (not just salmon and sea trout as it is at present).

Part 3 concerns enforcement. It is proposed that bailiffs will continue to be employed and controlled locally, although National requirements must be met. They must also be 'all species'.

A second tier of enforcement, Fishery Wardens will also be considered. They will have lower powers than Bailiffs, but will be a point of contact for anglers. Their powers will be set out in the Bill.

Part 4 gives the definitions and coverage of the Bill.

There are a number of key issues:

Finance is a very important element. At present most money comes from the salmon levy, and this has generated strong opinions.

It is the policy intention not to go down the route of a levy for all species therefore further funding streams must be developed. A management and development levy, essentially anglers pay, has been considered by several. However, it is Government policy, at the moment, not to introduce a rod licence.

FMO's will be statutory consultees for aquaculture. The groups are currently looking at other issues which may require this status.

This is a long-running process, and the groups will continue to meet and discuss aspects after the 2 May (when the current consultation ends).

The next steps will be:

Topic-specific related mini consultations, which will happen online.

Technical Advisory Groups will be set up to address specific issues.

There will have to be a transition period to ensure continuity from the old structures to the new.

Finance must be tied down as it is important that the FMO's are properly resourced.

A template must be developed to ensure that the fishery management plans are well developed and answer the local and national priorities.

CPD is being developed in conjunction with the IFM.

Fishery promotion and development is a key issue, but must be tackled sensitively.

Science and research must be developed to ensure that we can meet our international obligations.

KD asked the mix of consultation responses received. They are from a mix of organisations and individuals.

RW Has the SG any idea of the make up of an FMO? This is still being developed. There is a paper on this on the SRG page of the website. It is envisaged that the management board will have a wide membership, including proprietors, anglers, SNH, SEPA, HC, etc. and industry. Views are being taken.

PH Is there a Scottish equivalent to DEFRA? SEPA deal with the Water Framework Directive, controlling elements of the water but not the fishery.

PH felt we should give the rivers to SEPA rather than go through this consultation. Similar to the English model. RW noted that there were likely to be more problems if things were centralised, for example under SEPA.

SY agreed with this to an extent. He asked why there was a need for national direction when all fisheries are managed separately already.

PH questioned the need for the all species move to criminal law, asking the benefits compared to a protection order. SG has international obligations and a need to show that they are meeting them. There is also conflict in the interactions between the different fisheries.

SY feels that this area is a wild fishery. Any legislation which removes illegal activity from the central belt may well move it up to this area, where policing is more difficult.

KD asked how the boundaries would be developed. Existing boundaries will probably be used, both DSFB and AAG, but that they would be determined through discussion with stakeholders.

GL stated that gam fishing is worth a lot, as is aquaculture. Could a levy not be introduced to the farming industry in order to raise money? This has been suggested, together with levies on Hydro, etc., but it is unknown how this will be based. It is not a primary view for financing.

KD Fish farming pays towards the Crown Estate; could they not pay towards the management? They already do, as CE are major owners of fisheries.

ABJ suggested that the Consultation could be pushed through online forums, etc. He felt that it could be made more 'user-friendly'. The document is as simple as it can be, and has been widely circulated to a variety of users including clubs and tackle shops.

SY stated that there had been a good job of circulating the consultation, but that it failed to tell people the potential effects on their fishing.

GW noted that he wasn't a fisherman, but saw many problems with centralisation. He finds it difficult to believe that this won't happen. Will this organisation allow local bodies, i.e. the Trust, to continue operating? It is important to find a balance that shows that the Scottish Ministers can meet international obligations while keeping local management.

SY returned to the issue of wild fisheries and the need to preserve them. Everything that is required is already present within this area. We are doing a good job here so standardisation, as mentioned in the consultation, is scary. The plan is not to sweep everything away, but rather to build on what works.

KD noted that there was not enough meat within the consultation to take hard views on the direction. What will happen next? There will be a new Government after the election, and they will decide what to do. However assuming that they decide to continue, the aim is to have the Bill before Parliament mid-2017. Thus it will go through Parliament by the end 2017/2018. There will be a need to set out a transition period, so it will probably be 2 – 3 years before anything happens.

There will be consultation throughout developing proposals and the parliamentary process.

They are always happy to hear suggestions throughout the process and out with the consultation period.