

EXTRACT FROM DERWENT OWNERS' ASSOCIATION MEETING NOVEMBER 2015

The Environment Agency "Salmon Summit" 19th November 2015

On the 19th November the Environment Agency were holding a "Salmon Summit" in London to bring together influential leaders, policy makers, delivery bodies and NGOs to discuss and agree how they could collectively protect and enhance England's salmon stocks.

The outcomes the Agency was seeking included:

- Raise awareness about the state of England's salmon stocks
- Bring together those organisations and individuals that have an influence over the future of salmon and its environment
- Promote salmon as an iconic species for the water environment
- Outline our 5 point approach to achieve a better future for salmon
- Receive feedback and input on options being considered to conserve and enhance England's salmon stocks

To achieve a better future for salmon, the Agency was developing a 5 point approach that was "centred on meeting the needs of salmon throughout its lifecycle and engaged all those who have an influence on the salmon's environment."

The 5 point plan included:

- **Improving marine survival** – through continuing to support Defra in their work with NASCO and the European Union on actions to reduce pressures in international and inshore coastal marine waters.
- **Further reducing exploitation by nets and rods** – by voluntary measures and regulation.
- **Removing barriers to migration and enhance habitat** – working with partners through the catchment based approach.
- **Safeguarding sufficient flows** – through restoring sustainable abstraction
- **Maximising spawning success by improving water quality** – through schemes such as Countryside Stewardship and the water company National Environment Programme.

The Chairman had been in contact with Mark Owen of The Angling Trust and had said that, although the Salmon Summit was welcome, it was important that it addressed the issues that were felt to be of importance to salmon anglers, that it did not just become a "talking shop" and that it produced an actionable plan which could be implemented urgently.

Mark Owen has explained that the Angling Trust had been working very hard to put together an input to the Salmon Summit on behalf of The Angling Trust & Fish Legal, Atlantic Salmon Trust, Salmon and Trout Conservation UK and the Rivers Trust. It had been thought that a collective input from all these organisations would carry more weight than individual responses.

The headline objective of these organisations was: **for rapid and achievable measures to increase substantially the output of healthy wild smolts from all salmon rivers, and hence the number of returning adults to rebuild sustainable stocks of salmon.**

These organisations proposed that the following actions should be introduced at or shortly after the summit. These actions had been highlighted because it was believed that they could be implemented relatively rapidly. Because of its importance and interest to salmon anglers, the full text of the Angling Trust & Fish Legal etc. plan is given below:

1. Buy-out or close all mixed stock fisheries (MSFs) – those that exploit fish from more than one river system – in a much faster timescale than presently envisaged. For instance, the NE drift net fishery's proposed closure after the 2022 season is now too late to abide by international management guidelines agreed at NASCO, and the review of coastal set nets in 2017, with no indication of further regulation, is inadequate. Both these fisheries exploit significant numbers of salmon heading for Scottish rivers and, with the Scottish Government now proposing a complete closure of its coastal MSFs, we believe Defra is honour bound to take similar action.
2. With few if any rivers forecast to meet salmon conservation limits by 2019, we believe that, as in other countries, more needs to be done to reduce the number of salmon killed:
 - a) We believe that, as a matter of principle, no salmon should be deliberately killed in any river with severely threatened salmon stocks. We would like to see this achieved through the closure of any in-river or estuary netting and the vigorous promotion of catch & release (C&R) by anglers, proprietors, riparian owners, angling clubs etc. This would allow a greater number of fish to survive to spawn while supporting socio economic benefits to local communities, which are often located in remote areas and rely on the income generated from angling tourism.
 - b) Although anglers' returns indicate that about 80% of salmon caught in England are currently released, no rivers are currently forecast to achieve Not At Risk status, so steps should be taken to increase the numbers of salmon that survive to spawn on all salmon rivers. These should include the introduction of limits on the number of salmon that can be killed in a season (bag limits) in both rod and net fisheries and further encouragement of voluntary C&R.
 - c) We accept that C&R cannot guarantee the survival of all salmon released, but the use of appropriate angling methods and gear can significantly reduce accidental mortalities and steps should be taken to take forward the necessary changes. In addition, more needs to be done to raise awareness of the existing educational literature on how to handle and release fish safely.
3. Annual assessments of compliance with conservation limits are a key element of the approach to salmon conservation recommended by NASCO, but we believe that there are flaws in this process in England and Wales, and that a thorough review of assessment methods and conservation limits is needed. Better use can be made of data on juvenile abundance and also data collected by Rivers Trusts and other

science based organisations, and options for bringing the annual assessments forward should be developed.

4. Bring in the new and long-promised fish passage order – and enforce it.
5. Carry out a study of downstream migration and in particular the impact of barriers on smolt survival and predation levels (both immediately lethal and subsequent losses from damage/stress), followed by prioritised action to reduce smolt losses.
6. Implement abstraction reform, regulation of trickle irrigation, and the introduction of incentives and guidance to encourage on-farm reservoirs. It must be recognised that this is not just about low flows, but also about having flows that are high enough during appropriate periods to bring adult fish into and up rivers, and encourage and enable downstream migration of smolts.
7. Ensure compliance with regulations on agricultural pollution, particularly enforcing cross compliance as a condition of agri-subsidies. This would substantially reduce current pollution levels, but the draft basic measures which are being considered by Defra also need to be brought into force. Where voluntary measures have failed, impose Water Protection Zones.
8. Ensure coherence between Salmon Action Plans, Catchment Fisheries Plans, River Basin Management Plans, and Water Resources Plans.
9. Start the proposed monitoring review immediately (it was promised for winter 2014, then spring 2015 and it's now autumn 2015) and complete it within a year rather than over the proposed 3 years. There are fundamental inefficiencies in the current system which is not providing the information necessary to address the issues affecting salmon, including the failure to use data generated by third sector organisations. It is several years since the IFM hosted an event on Monitoring, in partnership with the EA, the outcomes of which have not been implemented.
10. Only 17% of English rivers are classified as being of good ecological status. This directly impacts on salmon populations and also makes fish more vulnerable to predation due to low flows, barriers to migration and lack of cover. Given the length of timescales proposed for tackling the issues causing failure to achieve good status, we believe that there should be an increase in the limit of cormorants and goosanders which can be lethally controlled each year to help balance the prey/predator relationship, and confirmation of the renewal of the contract for the Fishery Management Advisors.
11. Ensure that any proposals for tidal and hydro power generation have robust assessments of the likely impact on migratory fish, proper monitoring and mitigation regimes based on the assumption that harm will be caused, and requirements to modify and/or cease generating in the event that greater damage to stocks occurs.
12. Increase strategic funding for the national network of river trusts to deliver improvements to our river systems and catchments most cost-effectively.

13. Implement the comprehensive and integrated strategy set out in the Blueprint for Water's Water Matters document:

<http://blueprintforwater.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Blueprint-for-Water-Water-Matters.pdf>

Many of the actions being proposed in the 13 point plan put forward by the angling and fisheries NGOs and charities are in line with what we are doing locally already and it must be a good thing that these are getting support at national level. There are also additional actions called for which are beyond the scope of local organisations. These, again, must be welcome. However, members expressed the views that some other factors were contributing to the continued decline of salmon in our west coast rivers and these seemed to have been missed out of the discussions. These included predation by seals and the effects of large salmon farms off the west coast of Scotland.

Feedback from The Salmon Summit is being given at a meeting of the Angling Trust North West Area Fisheries Consultative Forum at Lancaster on 3rd December. The Chairman said that he had already booked a place to attend. Members had been sent further details and a link to allow anyone else who interested to find out more.

There is nothing in the 13 point plan about control of poaching / illegal fishing and the Chairman had taken this up with the Angling Trust. Mark Owen had explained that the Joint Statement had to be a compromise statement prepared on behalf of all the angling and fisheries NGOs and charities and this subject was not on the agenda for some of them. Never the less, the Angling Trust fully realised the importance of this problem to salmon anglers and was already doing something to try to improve things.