MANAGEMENT OPTIONS TO ADDRESS THE DECLINE IN STOCKS OF SALMON AND SOME SEA TROUT IN WALES
Board is requested to:

1. Consider the information provided on the status of stocks of salmon and sea trout in Wales

2. Provide advice on the proposed way forward and engagement with stakeholders on the options for future salmon and sea trout management

3. Agree that the environment and knowledge board sub-groups assist in developing the next steps
Decision required:

1. To endorse the need to protect more salmon and sea trout in order to increase the number that survive to spawn

2. To endorse the proposed approach to implement new byelaws and net limitation orders following a consultation on the management options available

3. To endorse the need for ongoing investment in river habitat restoration
Fisheries ‘Agenda for Change’

Sustainable Inland Fisheries in Wales

- Fisheries of Wales are iconic and highly valued
- Fish are valued as an important natural resource for Wales and are managed within sustainable limits
- The status of Welsh fisheries is an indicator of the health and resilience of the natural resources of Wales
- Fisheries contribute to viable, vibrant communities in Wales
The issue

• 23 principal salmon rivers in Wales
  – All stocks assessed as ‘At Risk’ or ‘Probably at Risk’
  – Forecast to remain so until at least 2019
  – Salmon as a feature of 6N2K sites are unfavourable
  – Salmon stocks “at lowest level ever” (AST)
  – Agreed Decision Structure for developing fishing controls

• 33 main sea trout rivers in Wales
  – 40% of stocks assessed as ‘At Risk’ or ‘Probably at Risk’
  – Stocks in SW Wales giving most cause for concern
  – We propose to use principle of the Decision Structure
Status of salmon stocks in Wales and England 2014

- At risk: 33%
- Probably at risk: 61%
- Probably not at risk: 6%
Salmon stock status in Wales
7 year trend 2007-2014

Number of rivers in each class

Year

2007 2008 2009 2010 2011 2012 2013 2014

number of rivers

AR PAR PNAR NAR
Sea trout stock status in Wales 2010-2014

Number of rivers in each class

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Reasons for poor performance

SALMON

• Stock decline is across the whole North Atlantic range
• Marine survival estimates are amongst the lowest in the long-term record

SEA TROUT

• Much more variable stock performance around Wales

BOTH SPECIES

• Freshwater habitats are not yet optimum
• Many issues implied or suspected
Important points

• We DO NOT think, and are not implying, that rod or net fisheries are the cause of stock declines

• We DO think that maximising the numbers of fish that survive to spawn is crucial, whilst other work is ongoing to restore river habitats
  – Likely to require changes to byelaws and NLOs

• A good and open-minded communication and consultation process is important and will be pursued
Management tools available

1. **Restoration** of freshwater habitats
   - Improving connectivity
   - Ensuring appropriate water quantity and quality
   - Restoration and management of habitats
   - Action by rivers trusts and NRW

2. **Encouraging further voluntary C&R** to increase spawning escapement

3. **Regulating** catch and kill of fish by rods and by nets
   Applying current policy (the Decision Structure)
   - Byelaws
   - Net Limitation Orders (NLOs)

Overall we need to reduce exploitation by both rods and nets, whilst maintaining socio-economic benefits where possible
1. Restoration of freshwater habitats

We will continue work to restore and maintain habitats

Approaches include:

- removing barriers and improving stream habitats
- NRM principles delivering broad environmental benefit
- applying Forest Water Guidelines in public and private forestry
- Improving upland management
- Re-investing hatchery funds

Partnership work:

- Funding delivery through NRW COMP
- Work with key partners on a strategic and integrated approach to secure funding
2. Increasing uptake of voluntary C&R fishing

Already a significant uptake of voluntary C&R over past decade

Current reported rates of C&R is 78%

this has been supported by

National Spring Salmon Byelaws (rods and nets)

Byelaws on rivers Wye and Taff/Ely

BUT: current policy requires:

- salmon - more action needed across Wales
- sea trout - need greater targeted action

Therefore need to increase C&R to maximise escapement, considering:-

- rod fishing method controls
- some methods incompatible with C&R
- need views from anglers
- socio-economic factors
3. Regulating SALMON catch – byelaws and NLOs

We need to apply the principle of the Decision Structure to SALMON Byelaws requiring full catch-and-release fishing

**Option 1** apply current agreed NRW guidance - 10 rivers
the minimum required under our management system
action to restore and protect our N2K rivers

**Option 2** apply to all rivers AR or PAR (declining) – 17 rivers
this would be fully compliant with current policy in E & W

**Option 3** apply to all rivers in Wales

**Note:** Byelaws would apply to both rods and nets
Forthcoming NLO review to regulate net fishing licences
3. Regulating SEA TROUT catch – byelaws and NLOs

Applying the principle of the Decision Structure to SEA TROUT

**Option 1** increase voluntary C&R in rod fisheries
includes targeted priorities

Options requiring byelaws for catch-and-release fishing

**Option 2** apply seasonal control to all rivers AR and PAR:
- rod only 8 rivers, including Seiont, Tawe
- rod and net Tywi, Taf, Cleddau
consultation critical

**Option 3** apply full control to all rivers AR and PAR
fully compliant with DS principle

**Option 4** apply to all rivers in Wales

Note: Forthcoming NLO review to regulate net fishing licences
Matters for consideration and future consultation

Salmon
Policy is clear – requires zero exploitation in many rivers
- duration of measures?

Sea trout
More scope:
- voluntary C&R
- byelaws - early season measures? Full season?
- managing apportionment between rods and nets?
- duration of measures?
- level of precaution?

Both
Net licence numbers to protect stocks?
Appropriate rod methods for C&R - baits, hooks, nets
Net licence buy-back?
Other management actions

Marine survival of salmon

VERY DIFFICULT – BUT:

• Good management practice here would bring influence in discussions on marine quotas for salmon
• We could support investigation and future protection of marine migration routes
• We could collate and provide evidence of harm through ocean warming
Conclusion

• Our ambition is: Sustainable and productive wild salmon and sea trout stocks in Wales
• Salmon stocks are in poor condition
• Sea trout stocks are in better shape but there are local concerns
• There is no evidence that angling or net fishing has been the cause of stock decline
• Management options: - optimise freshwater habitats
  - maximise survival to spawn through a mix of byelaws and NLOs
  - seek to influence marine factors
Next Steps

- **July**  
  Board meeting - your advice gratefully received  
  Future Board sub-group meetings

- **August – October**  
  Produce a Communications Plan  
  Engagement with stakeholder groups to share our analyses and options  
  Evidence from this will inform a technical case

- **Autumn**  
  Earliest formal consultation

- **2016**  
  Earliest possible implementation for SALMON

- **2017**  
  Earliest possible implementation for SEA TROUT

- **2016**  
  Monitor outcomes