

WATER RESOURCES ACT 1991

THE WALES ROD AND LINE (SALMON AND SEA TROUT) BYELAWS 2017

THE WALES NET FISHING (SALMON AND SEA TROUT) BYELAWS 2017

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APPENDIX TO THE REBUTTAL PROOF OF EVIDENCE

OF

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On behalf of

NATURAL RESOURCES WALES

JANUARY 2019

Our grandkids may never know salmon once swam in rivers. How will they ever forgive us?

— Professor Carlos Garcia de Leaniz

One of the world's leading experts on Atlantic salmon believes the iconic fish might be lost to Scotland unless emergency action is launched – including a ban on fishing.

Scientist Carlos Garcia de Leaniz, a professor in aquatic biology, warned that fishing for salmon – even on a catch-and-release basis – is contributing to its decline.

He said this generation's grandchildren may grow up unaware that salmon was once wild rather than farmed.

Salmon are already extinct or critically endangered in rivers in Spain, Portugal and France and the professor said governments are "deluded" if they think current safeguards are working.

Prof Garcia de Leaniz compared the plight of wild salmon to critically endangered species such as the black rhino.

He said: "It's a scandal, an absolute scandal. To think that something that has been part of our culture for perhaps 100,000 or 200,000 years can disappear in a matter of a few decades is just tragic. It is absolutely tragic.

"We meet with resistance from governments who just refuse to see it. They delude themselves with catch quotas of five, 20, 30 fish.

"Can you imagine a conservation programme for, say, the tiger, cheetah, or black rhino where hunters are allowed to catch five or 10 individuals? Or even to engage in catch-and-release? How can we



Professor Carlos Garcia de Leaniz

contemplate a scheme where we catch fish simply for fun and put them back in the river in the hope they are going to survive? Of course they are damaged by it.

"Catch-and-release is just like shooting black rhinos with darts, and only for fun. Would you do it?"

"The problem is that, regardless of the direct and indirect mortality it may cause, it masks the real problem and distracts people from the real issue, which is that wild populations are going extinct across the range, particularly at the southern edge.

"Catch-and-release is perhaps a cynical way of saying it's business as usual, and it allows anglers to keep at it – since fish are 'released' they can be caught again.

"It is shocking – it does not

happen with any other conservation programme."

Last year in Scotland, 90% of rod-caught salmon – and 98% caught in spring – were set free.

Marine Scotland announced in August it has commissioned a three-year study in collaboration with the University of Glasgow and the Cromarty Firth Fishery Board to examine whether catch-and-release has a negative impact on salmon.

Researchers will focus on the River Blackwater north of Inverness in a bid to establish the mortality rate and whether the surviving salmon are able to reproduce.

Studies carried out elsewhere in the world indicate a mortality rate of around 10%.

Archie Ferguson, president of the



Landowner Tuggy Delap remembers when 700 salmon were caught

Scottish Angling National Association, acknowledged catch-and-release is a "difficult" and fiercely debated topic in fishing circles.

He said anglers strive for best practice but called for more research to provide definitive answers to whether it harms fish.

But he also argued that the potential harm is offset by anglers being "front-line observers" of the river environment and banning fishing is not the answer.

It has been estimated the catch-and-release of a single salmon can be worth £2,000 to the economy through tourism and permits.

"There is an ongoing debate at the moment about the best practice for catch-and-release. I don't

think we have a definitive answer for the best policy," he said.

"Catch-and-release is a difficult one and, if I'm honest, the hooking, playing and releasing of any creature would be hard to justify to the layman, but angling goes well beyond just catching fish.

"We are the front-line observers of the river and water environments.

"We have a vested interest in ensuring that fish stocks, pollution levels, abstraction, hydro schemes et al are kept at healthy levels.

"Until we have an honest debate with stakeholders, where everybody takes an introspective look at the part they play, the situation will never improve. Asking anglers to stop

fishing for salmon is like trying to heal a life-threatening wound with a sticking plaster.

"And we must not only protect wild migratory and non-migratory fish stocks, we must also protect the anglers' right to fish."

Last year, an Environment Agency report on the catch and release of salmon stated there are "high survival rates".

The main factors found to reduce their chances of surviving were the fishing method, deep hooking leading to bleeding, abrasions from poor and excessive handling, being kept out of the water for too long and high water temperatures.

Salmon can also become exhausted and suffer a build-up of potentially harmful lactate and stress hormones if they are "played" for too long while being reeled in.

Most make a full recovery within two to 24 hours so long as they have not been injured.

The report stated: "The survival rate for salmon is greatly increased if proper angling techniques and gears are used and best practices for catching, handling and releasing angled fish are adopted."

Guidelines for safe catch-and-release include using barbless hooks and avoiding natural baits like worms as salmon can ingest them and be injured by the hook.

Anglers should also handle the fish gently and only lift it out of the water briefly to remove the hook and pose for a photograph with it.

The Sunday Post revealed last month that 2018 was the "worst in living memory" for salmon fishing.

Landowner Tuggy Delap told us that in her childhood more than 700 fish would be caught on the River Fyne. Last year four were caught. This year, only two.

She said: "It's been the worst year I can remember and I was born and

brought up here and I'm now 70. This year we caught two and when I was a child we used to catch 700.

"It was always my husband's ambition that his grandchildren would catch their first fish in the river, but it's just not going to happen."

Experts have said there are multiple reasons behind the catastrophic decline, including climate change, predation, river barriers and problems associated with fish farms, such as sea lice and escapes.

Prof Garcia de Leaniz is director of the Centre for Sustainable Aquatic Research at Swansea University and is undertaking a comprehensive assessment of the conservation status of Atlantic salmon in 5,000 European rivers.

"It's been the worst year I can remember and I'm now 70

Research has shown Atlantic salmon populations are most endangered at the southern-most limit of distribution, on the Iberian peninsula.

A century ago, 46 rivers in Spain teemed with salmon but now just six have numbers of "any significance".

Local authorities in Spain have established catch quotas of just a handful of salmon per year.

The professor added: "If the situation is so bad that you have to tell fishermen that they can only catch five individuals surely there must be an argument for saying catch zero then?"

"To think this so-called king of fish is now one of the cheapest fish you can buy and that our grandchildren may not remember this was once a wild fish and think it comes in these cages, I think it's tragic.

"It's very sad."



STILL HOPE: THE SPECIES SAVED

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