Spey Fishery Board

SPEY FOUNDATION

Annual Report 2015

www.speyfisheryboard.com

Top Left Cover Photo:	Visiting angler Bernard Hammick with dog, Haddie, and a fine 10lb salmon caught at Broom Pool, Delfur, in June 2015. (Photo: Mark Melville, Head Ghillie, Delfur Fishings)
Top Right Cover Photo:	A 14lb fish caught at Beaufort, Delfur, in June 2015, being voluntarily released. (Photo: Mark Melville, Head Ghillie, Delfur Fishings)
Bottom Cover Photo:	The River Spey at Carron & Laggan, September 2015 (Photo:Roger Knight)

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ANNUAL REPORT 2015

by

Roger Knight
Director

and

Brian Shaw
Biologist

January 2016

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Spey Fishery Board

Chairman: ***Brian Doran,*** Mandatory for Craigellachie Fishings

Proprietors:
Sir Edward Mountain Bt., Delfur Fishings
Oliver Russell, Mandatory for Ballindalloch Trustees
Angus Gordon Lennox, Gordon Castle Fishings & Mandatory for Brae Water Trust
Alan Williams, Carron Fishings
Peter Millar, Orton Estate
Dr. Catherine Wills, Knockando, Phones and Lower Pitchroy
Toby Metcalfe FRICS, Mandatory for Crown Estate Commissioners
Peter Graham FRICS, Mandatory for Rothes & Aikenway and Laggan Fishings
James Carr, Wester Elchies Fishings *(until May 2015)*

Co-optees:
Grant Mortimer, Strathspey Angling Improvement Association
Melville McDonald, River Spey Anglers Association

Invitees:
Councillor Douglas Ross, Moray Council
Gavin Clark, Scottish Natural Heritage
Grahame Newman, Scottish Environment Protection Agency

Clerk: ***William Cowie***, R. & R. Urquhart

Spey Foundation Committee

Chairman: ***Peter Graham FRICS***, Mandatory for Rothes & Aikenway and Laggan Fishings

Members:
Dr. Catherine Wills, Knockando, Phones and Lower Pitchroy
Sir Edward Mountain Bt., Delfur Fishings
Angus Gordon Lennox, Gordon Castle Fishings & Mandatory for Brae Water Trust
Alan Williams, Carron Fishings
Brian Doran, Mandatory for Craigellachie Fishings & SFB Chairman
James Carr, Wester Elchies Fishings *(until May 2015)*
Dr. Alastair Stephen, Scottish & Southern Energy
Sandy Smith, Ghillie, Knockando Estate *(until February 2015)*
Steve Brand, Ghillie, Ballindalloch Castle
Simon Crozier, Castle Grant Fishings *(since May 2015)*
Roger Knight, SFB Director
Brian Shaw, SFB Biologist
Polly Burns, SFB Assistant Biologist *(until August 2015)*
Duncan Ferguson, SFB Operations Manager

Spey Fishery Board Staff

Director:	**Roger Knight**
Accounts Manager:	**Alison Maxwell** (Part-Time and until April 2015)
Office Administrator:	**Sally Gross** (Part-Time)
Hatchery Manager:	**Jimmy Woods**
Operations Manager:	**Duncan Ferguson**
Head Bailiff:	**Richard Whyte**
Bailiffs:	**Jason Hysert**
	Lindsay Grant (until May 2015)
	Alistair Grant
Research:	**Brian Shaw** (Biologist)
	Polly Burns (Assistant Biologist until August 2015)
	Steve Burns (Assistant Biologist)
Spey Foundation:	**Euan Badenoch** (seasonal)

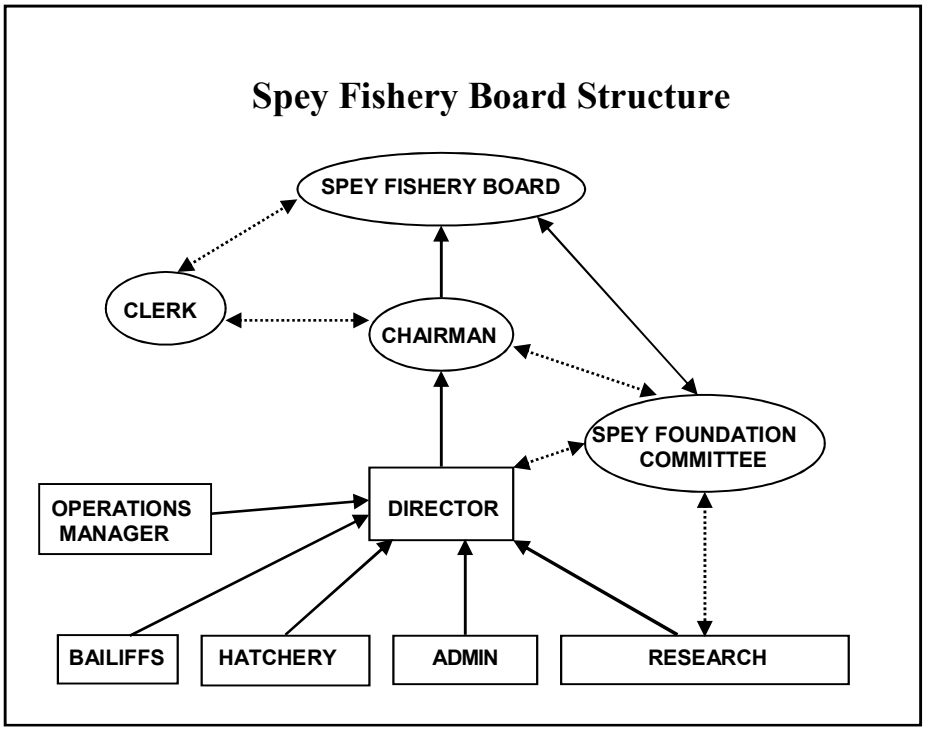

***Figure 1**: The Spey Fishery Board Structure*

Chairman's Foreword

Following the worst Salmon season since records began in 1952, I am delighted to be able to report on a much improved result in 2015.

The decline in numbers of returning adult Salmon slowed significantly with anglers catching 7,728 Salmon and Grilse, an improvement of 70 % over the previous season. The Sea Trout catch of 2,175, however, was 336 fish down on the previous year. This reduction in Sea Trout numbers was surprising as catches to the end of June were ahead by circa 600 fish.

River Spey anglers have long demonstrated a very responsible approach to conservation and 2015 was no exception. 94% of Salmon and Grilse caught were returned, an improvement of 2% over 2014. The Sea Trout release rate remained constant at 81%.

The challenges to the River Spey reported on last year including water abstraction, mixed stock netting, and the effects of climate change remain, although progress has been made on all fronts. Salmon Farming, particularly with the Government's stated aim to increase production by 50% by 2020, is an increasing threat to the wild Salmon. The massive populations of Sea Lice resulting from aquaculture kill Salmon Smolts as they head towards the feeding grounds in the North Atlantic.

Water abstraction remains a major threat to our wild Salmon population as any water removed from the catchment reduces the wetted area thus limiting the number of juvenile fish the region can support.

Another threatening aspect is the fish pass at Spey Dam which we do not believe is fit for purpose and does not allow proper access to spawning adult Salmon to the upper reaches of the river. The Board's Biologist, Brian Shaw, and his team Electro Fished the river above the dam in 2014 and found no juvenile fish from that year. A subsequent Electro Fishing exercise conducted by SEPA confirmed this. This exercise was repeated in 2015 with similar results although, on this occasion a very small number of fry were found. No Salmon Parr were caught however. The conclusion can only be that virtually no adult fish made it through the fish pass into the upper reaches of the river to spawn. This conclusion has been robustly rejected by the dam owner and operator, Rio Tinto Alcan, who insist that, in 2014, for example, well over 200 adult fish ascended the fish pass and continued up river to spawn.

The Board continued to pursue the issue and I am pleased to report that, as a result of these findings, SEPA have now reclassified Spey Dam as a barrier to fish passage. This has had a knock on effect on the classification of the river above Spey Dam under the provisions of the European Water Framework Directive. This requires that any heavily modified river meet the requirements of " Good Ecological Potential".

SEPA, as the regulator, will now need to ensure that Rio Tinto Alcan undertake significant remedial work, particularly on the fish pass, if the Scottish Government is to meet its international obligations under this directive.

The major issue we had to address in 2015 was the consequences of the Wild Fisheries Management Review conducted by Andrew Thin on behalf of the Scottish Government.

Thin reported in October 2014 with 53 separate recommendations which would have impacted substantially the management of wild fisheries in Scotland. I reported last year that we were waiting for the Government's reaction to these recommendations.

A 34 page response was published in May listing 38 questions on which the Government wished to consult. The Board was anxious that its response should be transparent and reflect the views of all those that might be affected.

To this end, three public meetings were held, in Craigellachie, Grantown-on Spey and Fochabers. Representatives of all sectors potentially affected by the proposed changes attended these meetings which were instrumental in raising public awareness of the Scottish Government's proposals for significant reform of the wild fisheries management sector.

The Government's proposals are wide ranging and include changes to the structure and function of existing District Salmon Fishery Boards and the areas they manage. The Government would like to see a smaller number of management organisations, currently being described as Fishery Management Organisations (FMOs) but have not yet offered any guidance as to how they should be made up or the areas for which they will be responsible. One aspect they have announced is that any new management organisation will have an all species remit. This introduces a number of complications not least of which is how the bodies which will inherit these responsibilities will be funded.
In view of the far reaching effects of the proposed changes we have communicated widely with other management Boards but in particular those of the other 'big rivers', the Dee, Tweed and Tay. I would like to record my thanks to our opposite numbers on these rivers, and others, who have so willingly offered their advice and support as we considered the likely impact of these proposals and our response to them.

A major issue was the proposal to introduce a licence to kill wild Salmon together with a carcass tagging scheme.

The Board submitted a very robust rejection of these proposals.

We argued that although there was considerable conservation benefit to be gained from licencing the mixed stock net fisheries, which kill 100% of all fish caught, there was no conservation benefit to be gained from licencing the rod fisheries which returned the vast majority of all fish caught, 94% on the Spey and well over 80 % across the country. We believed that such a proposal was flawed and unworkable.

I am pleased to report that the Government listened to our objections and have now dropped their proposals to introduce a kill licence for the rod fishery. We do support, however, the 3 year suspension of netting outside estuary limits which comes into effect in 2016. We believe that this is entirely appropriate, as most net fisheries are 'mixed stock' where the fish caught are destined for more than one river to spawn. Net and Coble fishing within estuary limits will still be permitted but subject to increased scrutiny. This limited form of netting will require a licence and be subjected to a strict quota based on sustainability of stocks. There has been, of course, no netting of any kind in the Spey District since 1994.

In September 2015, following their withdrawal of the proposal to introduce kill licences, the Government introduced revised proposals whereby rivers were to be categorised according to their conservation status. Rivers assessed as Category 1, including the Spey, are not required to take any action but rivers in Category 3, which includes the

majority of West Coast rivers, will be required to immediately introduce a 100% catch and release policy. All rivers, however, will be required to produce a conservation plan.

Such a plan for the Spey will reflect well on the earlier conservation policies introduced by the Spey Fishery Board and the responsible attitude towards conservation adopted by Spey fishers.

Further details of this and other proposed reforms together with our response to them will be dealt with by the Board's Director, Roger Knight later in this report.

Roger will also deal with the Government's proposed timetable to implement new legislation and comment on the likely impact to anglers, proprietors and all others likely to be affected by the proposed reforms.

The Board's involvement in dealing with these issues and formulating appropriate responses has required a significantly increased time commitment from Board members and members of staff. I would like to thank all my colleagues on the Board and our staff for the time and effort they willingly put in to ensure that our response to the proposed reforms was appropriate. I would particularly like to thank Peter Graham, Chairman of the Spey Foundation and Brian Shaw, our Biologist, for their support and guidance, as we considered our response to the more technical aspects of the proposed changes.

2016 will be a time of change as the Scottish Government seeks to press through these reforms, some of which will change the shape of wild fisheries management as we know it. The Board has been closely involved with every aspect of these proposals and, I believe, helped shape them. We will continue to develop our relationship and influence with government representatives, directly and also through our membership of the various committees and groups set up, to ensure that the best interests of the Salmon and Sea Trout that run our river and also the anglers that have supported us for so many years, are taken into account. The Spey Catchment Management Initiative also exemplifies the cooperation between the Spey Fishery Board and Public and Government agencies.

I would like to thank Roger Knight, our Director, for his support, stewardship and dedication throughout this very complex and busy period. Roger has guided us through these critical discussions with great skill and a determination to achieve the best possible result for the Salmon, the river, the anglers and the local economy. We are fortunate to have had a Director with his knowledge, commitment and enthusiasm to lead our team.

We will keep everyone informed of all developments in the introduction of any new legislation via the Spey Board website.

In conclusion, I hope that you will enjoy the new season and that the improvement in the number of returning fish continues so that we can look forward to the future of the wild Salmon and the success of the river and the local economy with renewed confidence.
I wish you all tight lines for the upcoming season.

Brian Doran
Chairman
Spey Fishery Board

Part 1

Statutory Remit of the Spey Fishery Board

1.1 Constitution

The Spey District Salmon Fishery Board (SFB) was established under the 1860s Salmon Fisheries legislation as subsequently amended and stated in the Salmon Act 1986 and the Salmon Conservation (Scotland) Act 2001. This legislation was later streamlined into the Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries (Consolidation) (Scotland) Act 2003, which has subsequently recently been amended by the Aquaculture and Fisheries (Scotland) Act 2013. The SFB is empowered under the legislation to take such acts as it considers expedient for the protection, enhancement and conservation of Atlantic Salmon and Sea Trout stocks and their fisheries (Table 1). The SFB is responsible for the Spey Fishery District (Figure 2), which includes 52 rod fisheries within the mainstem of the Spey and its tributaries. The District covers 107 miles of Mainstem River, approximately 560 miles of main tributaries and 20 miles of coastline in the Moray Firth, from Lossiemouth to the west of the Spey estuary to Cowhythe Head in the east. The District extends 3 nautical miles out to sea.

1.2 Aquaculture & Fisheries (Scotland) Act 2007

The Aquaculture & Fisheries (Scotland) Bill was passed by the Scottish Parliament on 1 March 2007 and received Royal Assent on 5 April. It has three main purposes: to provide a statutory basis for regulating previously unregulated practices in aquaculture; to enhance emergency powers for controlling Gyrodactylus salaris (a parasitic disease in salmon); and to make a number of miscellaneous amendments to salmon, freshwater and sea fisheries legislation.

The Act also brought changes to restrict the introductions and transfers of fish. Whilst this legislation does not specifically affect Salmon hatcheries on rivers which have District Salmon Fishery Boards, it led to the Association of Salmon Fishery Boards (ASFB) and Rivers and Fisheries Trusts Scotland (RAFTS) producing more robust guidelines for stocking which have continued to play an integral part in the SFB's stocking policy since 2011 (see section 3.3).

1.3 Aquaculture & Fisheries (Scotland) Act 2013

In December 2011 the Scottish Government went out to consultation on a draft Aquaculture & Fisheries Bill. Recognising that aquaculture production and Salmon and freshwater fisheries are both equally important sectors, it sought to manage them effectively as part of the wider marine and freshwater environment. The Bill was introduced to Parliament on 3rd October 2012 and the Aquaculture and Fisheries (Scotland) Act 2013 received Royal Assent in June 2013. It came into force on the 16th September 2013.

The Act consists of six parts, the second of which relates to Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries. There are a number of provisions relating to duties of openness, transparency and accountability, including:

- a duty to publish and copy to Scottish Ministers the Annual Report and audited accounts;

- a duty to hold at least one public meeting, with all other meetings held in public unless there are good reasons for them to be held in private;

- a duty to maintain and keep under review arrangements for dealing with complaints;

- and a duty to maintain, and keep under review, arrangements for the registration and declaration of relevant financial interests of board members.

Aside from aquaculture issues, the Act also provides powers for Scottish Ministers to include changes to annual close time orders as part of a salmon conservation measure. Furthermore, it imposes requirements on DSFBs and proprietors relating to the monitoring and evaluation of the effect of annual close time orders and salmon conservation regulations (and on DSFBs for baits and lures regulations) - the contravention of which may become a criminal offence. It also provides an enabling power for Scottish Ministers to modify, by regulation, DSFBs functions under the 2003 Act with respect to consenting to stocking.

The SFB has put in place measures to ensure it is in full compliance with the latest legislation. Furthermore, since November 2013 and in addition to annual public meetings, the Board has conducted the major part of all of its quarterly meetings in Open Session to enable members of the public to attend.

1.4 Complaints Procedure

Section 24 of the Aquaculture and Fisheries (Scotland) Act 2013 amended the 2003 Act to place a number of new duties on DSFBs relating to openness and accountability. The new section 46D requires a DSFB to: *'maintain, and keep under review, proper arrangements for dealing with complaints made to the board about the way in which the board have carried out, or propose to carry out, their functions under this Act or any other enactment'*

The SFB has published its complaints procedure on its website. Full details can be found at: http://www.speyfisheryboard.com/spey-fishery-board-complaints-procedure/

No complaints were received by the SFB during 2015.

Table 1. Statutory Responsibilities of the Spey Fishery Board

1. Provide fisheries protection;
2. Set Salmon rod fishery season (11th February – 30th September);
3. Set Sea Trout rod fishery season (11th February – 30th September);
4. Police weekly rod fishery close times (midnight Saturday – midnight Sunday);
5. Police the purchase and sale of illegally-caught or unseasonable fish;
6. Ensure fish passage over obstructions to migration;
7. Protect juvenile fish and spawning redds;
8. Regulate the movement and/or introduction of adults, juveniles and ova.

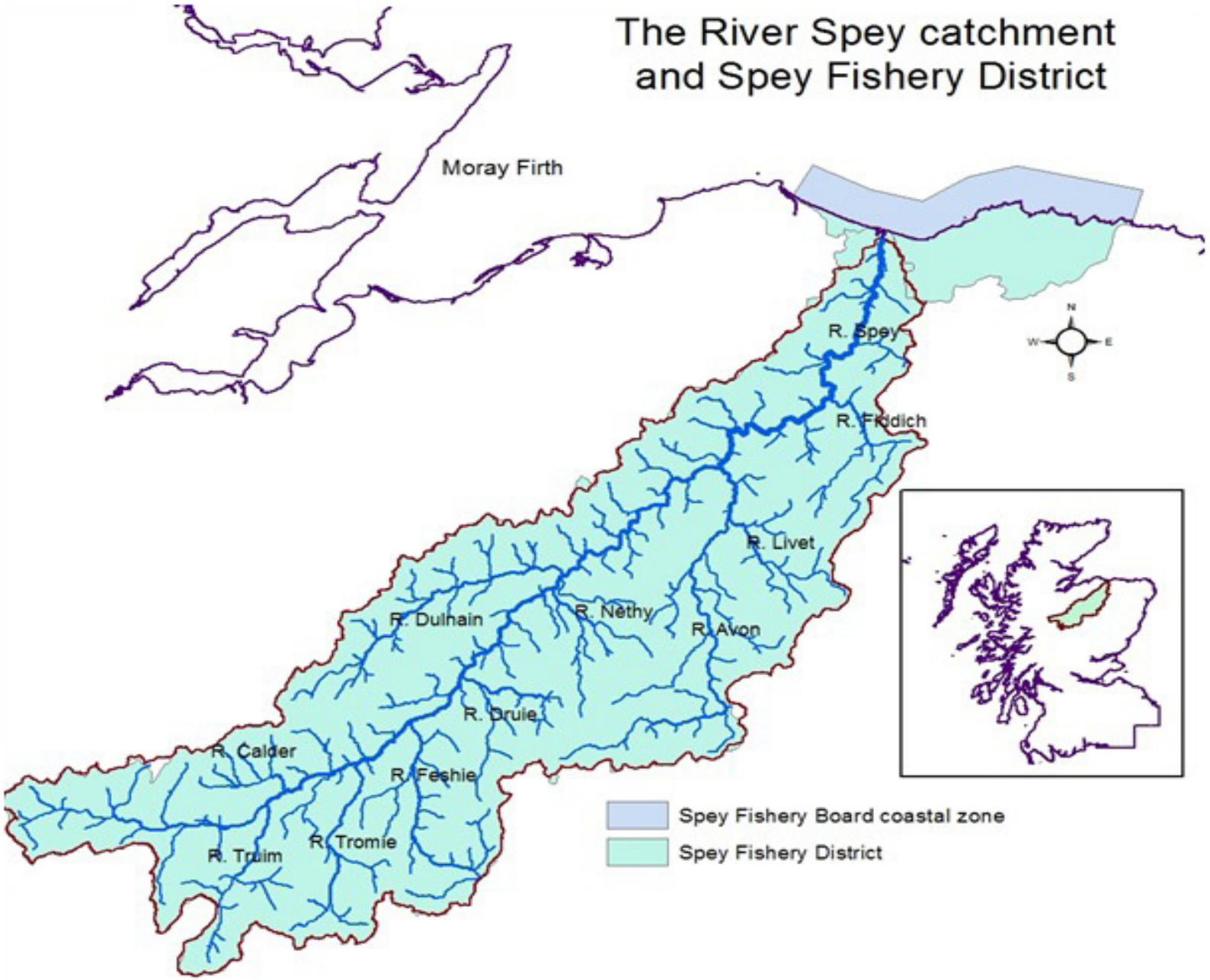

Figure 2: *The River Spey Catchment and Spey Fishery District.*

1.5 Wild Fisheries Review

We reported last year that the Scottish Government had announced in January 2014 that a review of Wild Fisheries Management would be undertaken, led by Andrew Thin (former Chairman, Scottish Natural Heritage). This followed the Aquaculture and Fisheries Act 2013 and a Scottish National Party manifesto commitment to ensure that Freshwater Fisheries Management structures are fit for purpose for the 21st century.

The Review Team presented their report to Ministers on the 6th October 2014. It contained 53 recommendations, including the following:

- A small central team (possible called the National Wild Fisheries Unit) should be established within Marine Scotland. This should be responsible for strategic direction, effective regulation and national co-ordination.

- Local delivery should be by a network of Fishery Management Organisations, which would be neither Boards or Trusts, but likely to be a hybrid or merger of the two. These should operate to an agreed "all species" fishery management plan. A model constitution was also recommended to be developed to ensure that these organisations are fit for purpose via "Approved Body Status".

- There was no clear explanation of the financial structures that would support these organisations, although the report recommended that the Assessment system should be retained as the cornerstone for funding such an all species remit. Furthermore, it recommended that this should be collected centrally, rather than locally, and in two parts: a national levy, broadly based upon business rates; and a local levy. The Central Unit could then distribute funding down to those local Fishery Management Organisations achieving Approved Body Status.

- "Sustainable harvesting" via a licenced quota system for the killing of fish, linked to carcass tagging, was also recommended to be developed. This should apply to both rods and nets.

1.6 Wild Fisheries Reform: The Scottish Government's Response to the Wild Fisheries Review

The Scottish Government published its response to the Wild Fisheries Review on the 15th May 2015. It was a 34-page response which went out to public consultation on 38 questions. Reference to "WFR" had been retained, but this had developed to Wild Fisheries Reform, rather than Review, signalling the Government's intention to progress to implementation.

The Board decided that it would hold three public meetings to raise awareness of the Government's Consultation and to discuss issues that the public felt we should consider in formulating our response to it. These were held: at Craigellachie on the 4th June; at Grantown on Spey on the 9th June; and at Gordon Castle, Fochabers, courtesy of Angus Gordon Lennox, on the 11th June 2015.

To promote these meetings, we had written to all of the proprietors, ghillies and angling associations along the river and placed advertisements in the local media. The meetings were reasonably well-attended and allowed for a full and frank exchange of views. In particular, they were useful in raising public awareness of the Scottish Government's proposals for significant reform of the Wild Fisheries Management structures.

The Board decided that its response to the Consultation would be made jointly with the Spey Foundation and this was refined at an Extraordinary Board Meeting on the 7th July. Legal advice, which had been obtained by the Association of Salmon Fishery Boards (ASFB) and Rivers & Fisheries Trusts Scotland (RAFTS) , was also considered and the final document was submitted to the Scottish Government on the 7th August 2015. It was also published on the Board's website and can be found at the following web link:

http://www.speyfisheryboard.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/SFB-TSF-Response-to-WFR-Consultation-070815.pdf

The Government has established a Stakeholder Reference Group to inform the development of the broad principles for a new management system and see these through to detailed proposals and new legislation. Membership of the group includes: the Association of Salmon Fishery Boards; Rivers & Fisheries Trusts Scotland; The Salmon & Trout Association; representatives of the Coarse and Salmon Net Fishing Associations; a representative of the salmon proprietors; and a representative of the Scottish Gamekeepers Association (SGA). The SFB's Operations Manager, Duncan Ferguson, is the SGA representative because of the Association's representation of Ghillies and because he is a former Head Bailiff.

The ASFB and RAFTS have also developed a Joint Working Group to co-ordinate the responses of Boards and Trusts/Foundations to the Wild Fisheries Review. This working group does not have any executive authority (which is retained by its respective Boards) but has been developing ideas, as appropriate, on how best to respond to any Government initiative to take forward recommendations from the Review. The Joint Working Group will also consider how best to ensure that any transition period between current, and any potential new arrangements, is managed effectively and efficiently. Membership of this group consists of the ASFB Management Committee and the RAFTS Board. The SFB Director, Roger Knight (as a member of the former) is therefore a member of the Joint Working Group.

The Scottish Government has also begun work on a draft National Strategy to ensure that work carried out locally will enable the Scottish Government to achieve its international obligations. The Scottish Government has said that it will consult on this early in 2016 and at the same time as it consults on a draft Bill for a new wild fisheries management system. The intention is to lay the draft Bill before Parliament prior to the next Scottish election in May 2016. The Spey Fishery Board and the Spey Foundation will be working closely with the Scottish Government and the ASFB and RAFTS over these developments throughout 2016.

1.7 Proposals for Licences to Kill Wild Salmon and Carcass Tagging Scheme

In response to the WFR's recommendations for a system of sustainable harvesting, the Scottish Government consulted in February 2015 on proposals to introduce a licensing system for the killing of wild salmon, together with an accompanying carcass tagging scheme. The SFB and the Spey Foundation (TSF) submitted a comprehensive objection in response, in which they explained that whilst the introduction of a licencing and carcass

tagging scheme for fish killed by commercial net fisheries would have significant conservation benefits, it would be unnecessary, inappropriate and unworkable for the rod and line fisheries. The Board and Foundation also suggested that the Government consider a more pragmatic and achievable system, which might apply to both rod and line as well as to net fisheries. They also suggested that it would be sensible for the Scottish Government to consider the Norwegian Government's approach, to see if it might be applicable in Scotland.

Despite the SFB/TSF objection, and those of others, the Scottish Government announced in late July 2015 its intentions to prohibit the killing of salmon out-with estuary limits and to introduce a licensing system for the killing of any wild salmon, together with an accompanying carcass tagging scheme. The SFB/TSF prepared a Briefing and submitted another comprehensive objection in response to the Scottish Government. They reiterated that they agreed with the general provision to prohibit the killing of salmon out-with estuary limits. These proposals were entirely appropriate, in line with international best practice and were to be welcomed. However, the Board maintained that the control of mixed stock fisheries should not be combined with and confused by controls on rod fisheries, which it reiterated would be unnecessary, inappropriate and un-workable given the existing control measures, both voluntary and by law, that limit the killing of rod-caught salmon. The Board therefore objected to these unwarranted proposals in so far as they related to rod and line fisheries, because there was no conservation reason for them in light of the highly successful voluntary system that was already in place.

Full details of the SFB's objection to this consultation can be found on the Board's website at the following web address:

http://www.speyfisheryboard.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/SFB-Kill-Licence-Objection-180815.pdf

In late September 2015, the Scottish Government went out to consultation on revised proposals for salmon conservation. These dispensed with killing licences and instead categorised rivers according to their conservation status. This was a significant success for those who had objected to the original proposals, including the Spey Fishery Board and the Spey Foundation.

The new proposals also clarified that fishing out-with estuary limits would still be prohibited, but for three years and would be followed by a review. Meanwhile, the fishery districts - and the Government has identified 109 of them around Scotland – and 20 Special Areas of Conservation will be categorised each year to determine their conservation status and put into one of three categories:

- Category 1: Districts which are at or exceeding their Conservation Limit and which have at least an 80% expectation of doing so next year. These require no further intervention, particularly as the Government has recognised that voluntary conservation measures that are already in place are working well. The River Spey falls within this category, together with 19 others. However, rivers in Category 1 still need to produce a Conservation Plan.
- Category 2: These are fishery districts where there is a 60% to 80% chance of achieving the Conservation Limit. Management action to reduce exploitation is required and although catch & release has not yet been made mandatory for these rivers, conservation plans will be required to be put in place. There are 21 districts which fall within this category.
- Category 3: These are districts where there is less than a 60% chance of achieving the Conservation Limit. The Scottish Government's Marine Scotland Science has assessed that

exploitation is unsustainable in these areas and management actions are required to address this. In the meantime, mandatory catch & release is to be introduced and conservation plans are required to be drawn up. There are 88 districts that fall within this category.

The Government has also clarified that carcass tagging for net-caught fish which are taken within estuary limits and which are intended to be sold, will also be introduced. The cost of tags will initially being born by the Scottish Government, but the Spey will not be affected by this proposal.

Marine Scotland Science have convened a working group of senior biologists, including the SFB's Biologist, Brian Shaw, to develop further their work on this conservation status issue, which they recognise is still at a formative stage. The map below in figure 3 illustrates the current categorisation of Scotland's fishery districts.

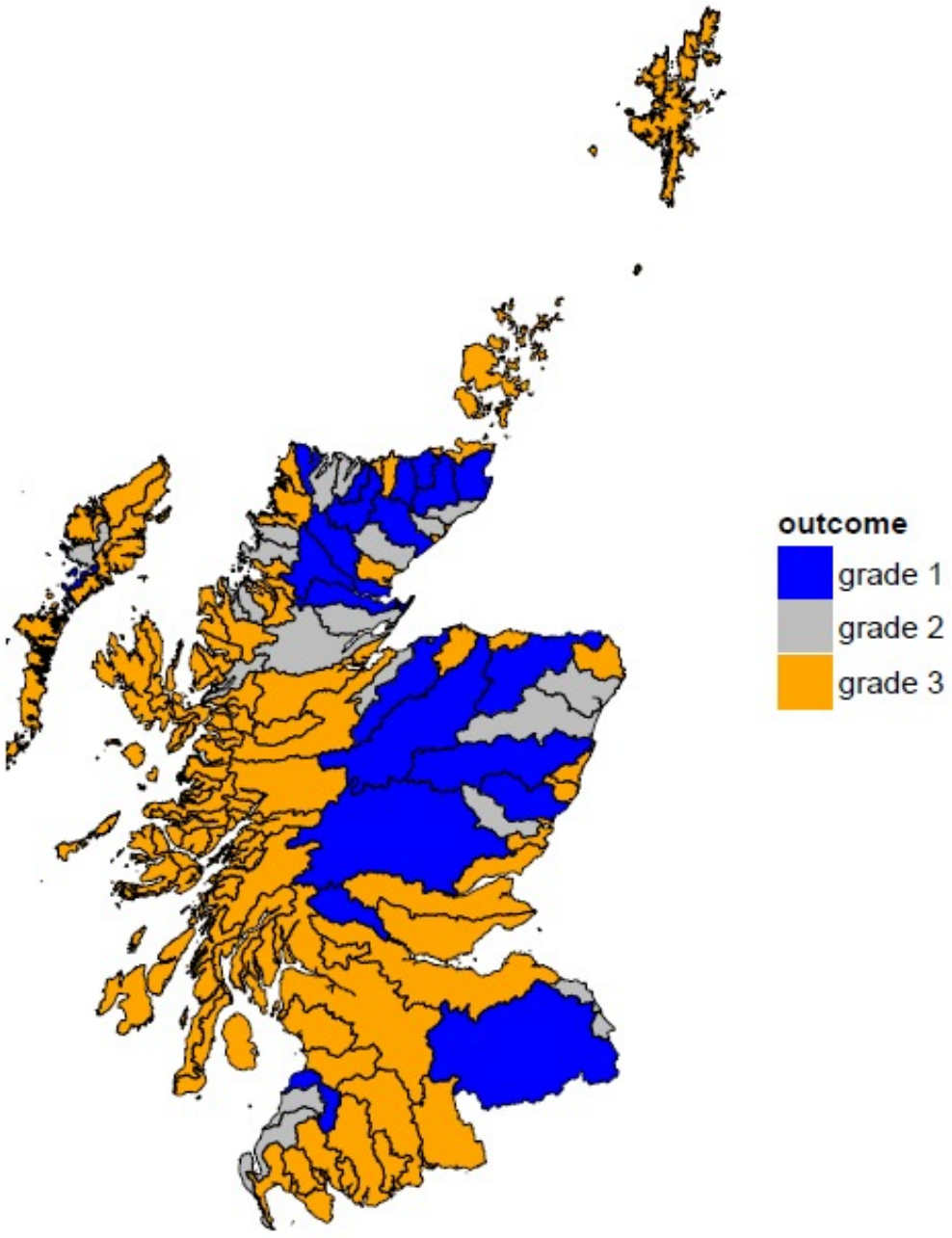

Figure 3: *A map of Scotland illustrating the categorisation of the 109 fishery districts and 20 Special Areas of Conservation.* (Image courtesy of Marine Scotland Science)

1.8 EU Water Framework Directive

The European Union (EU) Water Framework Directive came into force in December 2000 and was transposed into Scottish law through the Water Environment & Water Services Act 2003. Under the aegis of the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA), the Act aims to establish a process of River Basin Management Planning to achieve "Good Ecological Status" of freshwater, groundwater and coastal water bodies by 2027. For Heavily Modified Water Bodies (e.g. those impacted by water diversion for the production of hydro electricity) such as parts of the River Spey, the aim is to achieve "Good Ecological Potential".

SEPA divided Scotland into eight sub-basins, where catchments of similar types are grouped and managed collectively. The Spey is included in the North East sub-basin, which also includes the Rivers Deveron, Ythan, Don and Dee. The SFB is part of the North East Area Advisory Group which developed its first Area Management Plan. This in turn formed part of Scotland's first River Basin Management Plan (RBMP), which concluded in 2015. During 2015 SEPA consulted on its second RBMP, which will run from 2015 - 2021, and the third and final Plan will be implemented between 2021 - 2027.

Preliminary work by SEPA on the RBMP involved the categorisation of all water bodies throughout Scotland as good, moderate or poor, in order to prioritise the work necessary to implement the WFD. The SFB had disputed the moderate category awarded to parts of the upper River Spey, which it believed should be categorised as poor due to the significant levels of water impoundment, diversion and abstraction and the effects that these have had upon the ecology of the area. SEPA has subsequently revised a number of these categorisations, with some Spey Water Bodies (e.g. the River Markie, just above Spey Dam) now categorised as poor. Significantly, at the end of 2015 SEPA re-classified Spey Dam as a barrier to fish passage, with a consequential effect on the water bodies above the Dam. This is covered in more detail in section 1.9 of this Report.

In 2013 the UK's Technical Advisory Group (UKTAG), of which SEPA is a member, issued revised guidance for the implementation of the WFD. This recommended that maintained flows in water bodies are not necessarily ideal for all fish species. The situation in the Rivers Truim and Tromie is that their flows are maintained at a level which, from time-to-time, are higher than they would naturally be. The revised UKTAG guidance is based upon flow variability and a "building block" approach, with site specific information incorporated. Furthermore, the guidance recommended that an adaptive management approach should also be adopted, with flows varied if the original proposals are found to be unsuitable.

The SFB will continue to work closely with SEPA throughout 2016 on the implementation of the WFD as it begins the implementation of the second River Basin Management Plan.

1.9 Water Abstraction Update

Above: *An aerial view of Spey Dam, operated by Rio Tinto Alcan.* (Photo: Roger Knight)

1.9.1 Rio Tinto Alcan: Spey Dam

The SFB remains concerned by the significantly high levels of water abstraction, particularly in the upper catchment by Rio Tinto Alcan, which is licensed to divert substantial volumes of water from Spey Dam, some twelve miles from the source of the Spey, to Fort William. The impact of the abstraction and its associated infrastructure on the upper Spey salmon population is severe; the Board's electro-fishing monitoring above the dam in 2014 found that there were no salmon fry present at any of the ten sites visited. This was subsequently and independently verified by SEPA, which also conducted electro-fishing surveys above Spey Dam during 2014. The Board's monitoring during 2015 showed low numbers of salmon fry present at most sites electro-fished above Spey Dam, indicating that a few fish had ascended the Dam's fish pass and limited spawning had taken place. However, no salmon parr were found to be present.

The Board remains concerned about the efficacy of the fish pass at Spey Dam and also maintains that the water flows emanating from the Dam are insufficient to allow adult salmon to ascend up to and above it to spawn, or to allow salmon smolts to descend below it. The Board is also worried about the effectiveness of the screens at the off-take in preventing juvenile fish from exiting the River Spey and its catchment and gaining access to Loch Laggan, and troubled by the water flow speeds through the off-take and down the Crunachden Cut. The heck on the River Markie, which enters the reservoir immediately above Spey Dam, also remains an issue as it appears to completely block access to migratory fish.

During the summer of 2015, RTA drained-down the fish pass at Spey Dam to monitor the numbers of fish within it. The Board's Biologist, Brian Shaw, was invited to attend this. No salmon were found within it, although a number of trout were discovered.

Significantly, in late 2015 SEPA re-classified Spey Dam as a barrier to fish passage. This has thereby re-classified Spey Dam as "poor" under the EU's Water Framework Directive (WFD), with a consequential impact on the water bodies above Spey Dam, which are now also classified as "poor" (see section 1.7). Significant remedial action will need to be taken during the second and third River Basin Management Plans in order for this area to achieve the requirements of the WFD.

The Board is engaging positively with SEPA and Rio Tinto Alcan to deliver improvements in this uppermost part of the river and looks forward to further progress on these issues during 2016.

Above : *An aerial view of the River Spey as it enters the reservoir above Spey Dam. The off-take and the Crunachden Cut, down which water is diverted to Fort William via Loch Laggan, is clearly visible to the right of the River Spey.* (Photo: Roger Knight)

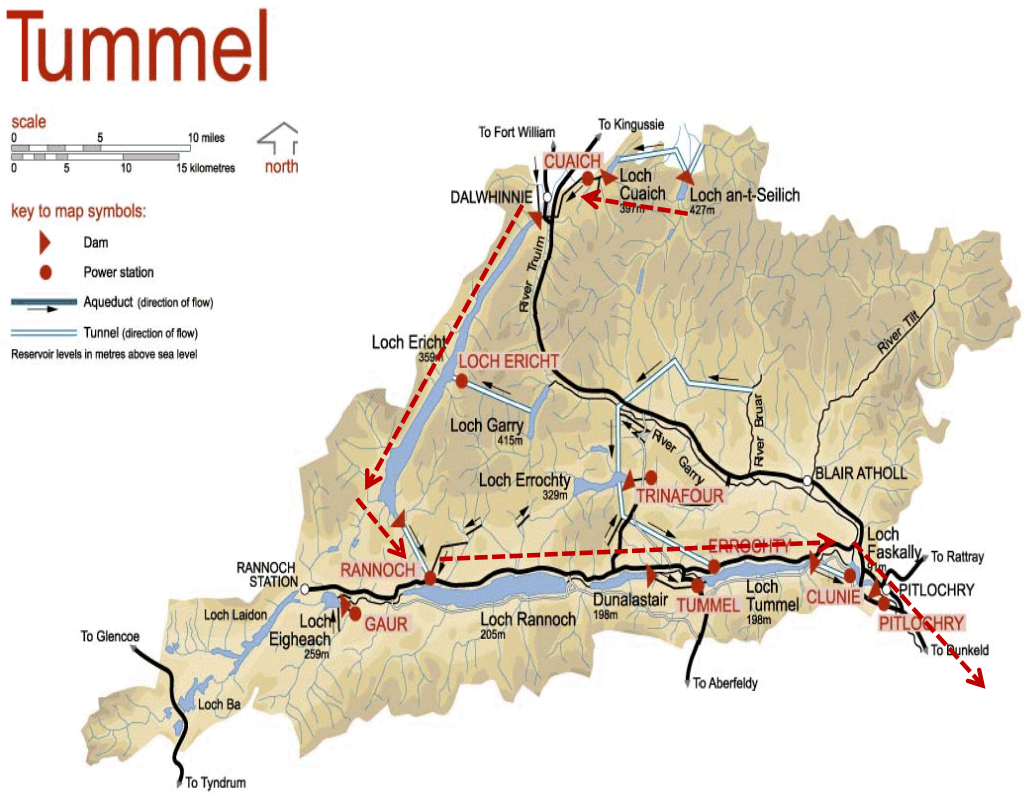

Figure 4*: Scottish & Southern Energy's Tummel Scheme CAR Licence allows the diversion of water from the Spey Catchment into the Tay catchment. The red dotted line illustrates the current regime as water is taken from the Spey's upper tributaries, the Rivers Tromie and Truim, and transferred into the Tay catchment to pass through seven power-generating stations.*

1.9.2 Scottish & Southern Energy: Tummel CAR Licence Scheme

Scottish & Southern Energy (SSE) divert water from Loch An-t Seilich at the top of the River Tromie and from the River Truim, both important upper Spey Salmon spawning tributaries, into the River Tay catchment as part of the Tummel CAR (Controlled Activities Regulations) Licence Scheme. Water from Loch An-t Seilich (River Tromie) and from Loch Cuaich, which is also impounded by SSE, is piped to a power station on the River Cuaich (a tributary of the River Truim) before being channelled to Loch Ericht near Dalwhinnie. This Spey water from Loch An't Seilich and Loch Cuaich, together with water from the off-take above Dalwhinnnie at the top of the Truim, then travels through Loch Rannoch and on to Loch Tummel, passing through six further power stations at Rannoch, Gaur, Tummel, Errochty, Clunie and Pitlochry, before being disharged into the Tay system (see Figure 4). In addition, water is also diverted from the Allt An't Sluie, which is another tributary of the Truim. This water would naturally join the Truim below the initial off-take referred to above.

Since September 2006, SSE had proposed to re-water the River Garry (in the Tay catchment, the flow from which is diverted to generate hydro-electricity) under the Water Framework Directive (WFD). However, water from Loch Garry that would be put down the River Garry to achieve this (instead of being diverted to Loch Ericht) would pass through only three power stations, instead of the five that are currently utilised under this regime. To achieve the requirements of the WFD, whilst also maintaining Scotland's renewable energy policies, SSE had therefore proposed to reduce the compensation flows down the Rivers Tromie and Truim even further, so as to enable the transfer of more water to the Tummel Scheme and thereby compensating for the minor loss in energy that would otherwise result from re-watering the River Garry.

We reported last year that in September 2014, SSE withdrew its application to vary the Tummel Scheme CAR Licence. This had been a considerable success for the Spey Fishery Board, which justified the initial decision taken by the Board to object to the proposals and the considerable amount of work involved subsequently over eight years. However, there remains work to be done; the Water Framework Directive still has to be implemented. This will require the River Garry in the Tay catchment and the River Cuaich in the Spey catchment to be re-watered, the latter of which was due to be completed during the first of the three River Basin Management Plan (RBMPs) and by the end of 2015.

SEPA still has yet to formally decide how it will respond to SSE's withdrawal. Whilst the SFB had objected to some of SSE's proposals, there had been positives as well, such as the re-watering of the Allt Bhran and the Cuaich. The whole flow from the Allt Bhran, which is the most significant tributary of the River Tromie, is currently diverted into the Tromie Dam, thereby denying access to it by migratory fish. However, the restoration of a flow down the lower section of the Allt Bhran provides a significant river restoration opportunity and the SFB remains keen to develop this.

SEPA has also acknowledged that this might now present them with an opportunity to take a more holistic approach to water flow management throughout the upper Spey catchment. In this respect, any proposed flow changes to the Truim and Tromie as part of the implementation of the Water Framework Directive should also take into consideration the flow emanating from Spey Dam. The SFB will be pressing SEPA to move forwards with this and working closely with them in the process.

Above: *The water off-take at the Allt Bhran, the most significant tributary of the River Tromie. All of the Allt Bhran's flow is diverted into the Tromie Dam, most of which is then sent on in to the Tay catchment to generate hydro-electricity.* (Photo: Brian Shaw)

Above: *Scottish & Southern Energy's impoundment at Loch Cuaich, water from which would naturally flow down the River Cuaich and in to the River Truim, near Dalwhinnie. Instead, all of the flow from Loch Cuaich is diverted into Loch Ericht and then in to the Tay catchment, for the production of hydro-electricity.* (Photo: Roger Knight)

1.10 Angling, Canoeing and Access

A major issue highlighted by the economic survey commissioned by the Spey Catchment Management Plan was the potential conflict between angling and canoeing. This situation was complicated by the introduction of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 and the launch of the Scottish Outdoor Access Code in 2005. The Code encourages reasonable and responsible access to rivers and river banks, and has been promoted within the Spey catchment by the Moray Council, Highland Council, SNH and the Cairngorms National Park Authority.

To aid the resolution of any issues, core representatives of the Spey Users' Group (SUG), including the SFB, Scottish Canoe Association and Access Officers from the three Local Authorities, met again in November 2015. However, 2015 was generally another settled year between paddling and angling interests, with only one incident reported to the SFB. The principle concerns remain though, in relation to the significant numbers of paddlers between the Ballindalloch and Knockando areas of the River, which are acknowledged to be the busiest paddler sections of the River. Furthermore, to ensure that both anglers and paddlers enjoy their respective sports with the minimum of disruption, we are taking this opportunity to re-publish the SFB Briefing entitled, "Paddlers on the River Spey: Guidance for Anglers". This was originally published in 2008 but is still just as relevant today.

www.speyfisheryboard.com

PADDLERS ON THE RIVER SPEY: GUIDANCE FOR ANGLERS

The River Spey, as well as being one of the world's finest salmon fishing rivers, is also popular with other water sports users, including canoeists and rafters.

In 2003 the Land Reform (Scotland) Act gave recreational access rights to the general public to most land and water within Scotland. This right applies to recreational, commercial and educational activity, including walking, cycling, horse-riding and canoeing. In 2005 the Land Reform Act confirmed the right of reasonable and responsible pedestrian access (including walkers, cyclists, horses) over land (except curtilage and cropped field) and to non-motorised craft over water.

Guidance on responsible behaviour for both recreational users and land managers is contained within the Scottish Outdoor Access Code, a copy of which is available online at **www.outdooraccess-scotland.com**

Furthermore, the Scottish Canoe Association has produced detailed guidance under the "Paddler's Access Code" (available from www.canoescotland.com), about which the majority of canoeists and rafters are aware. Paddler guidance, specific to the Spey, is available online at www.speyguide.co.uk

Anglers on the River Spey are quite likely to see canoeists and rafters when they are fishing, approaching anglers from upstream. The Spey Fishery Board continues to work with the Scottish Canoe Association to try to ensure that both anglers and paddlers experience as little disruption as possible to their respective sports. To facilitate this, the Board and the Association have produced the Guide for Anglers printed overleaf. It is hoped that this will allow both anglers and paddlers to enjoy their respective sports with the minimum of disruption. The key to harmony on the river is mutual respect as well as courtesy between all river users.

Anglers can reasonably expect that:

The leader of the paddling group will endeavour to ensure that anglers are aware of their presence, either by shouting or blowing a whistle that can be heard above the water noise.

Once contact has been established, the leader will request the angler's preferred line of passage for the paddling group.

The paddlers will wish to cause minimum noise and disturbance to the angler and will move in the direction indicated, water depth and obstructions permitting. Where the angler is standing on the bank, the direction indicated to the paddlers may include going towards the opposite bank, towards the angler and even under the rod. If the angler is wading, canoeists will be happy, where possible, to pass behind the angler i.e. between the angler and the bank.

Paddler group leaders will endeavour to have their group pass in fairly close formation, allowing for a reasonable, safe distance between each boat, thus minimising the time taken to pass.

If an angler is playing a fish, paddlers normally wait upstream until the fish is landed or until there is an indication from the angler or ghillie that it is safe to pass in the angler's preferred direction.

In the event of an inadvertent capsize, paddlers will do their utmost to affect efficient rescue and refloat the upturned canoe as soon as possible. Anglers will know that the River Spey is fast-flowing and its currents can catch out even the most experienced paddlers!

Once past the angler, the paddler group will quietly continue on their way downstream. Paddlers will not "loiter" unnecessarily or "play" in a pool where someone is fishing.

Anglers are requested to:

Acknowledge that they are aware of the presence of the paddlers.

Carefully consider which line is most practical for both angler and paddler.

Give clear direction as to the preferred route the craft should take.

Refrain from casting whilst boats pass by (although it is not always necessary to take in line).

Only resume fishing once the boats have completely passed the angler.

(Issued jointly by the Scottish Canoe Association & the Spey Fishery Board.)

Part 2

Fisheries and Conservation

2.1 Salmon and Grilse Catches

Whilst 2015 was not a record year for salmon & grilse catches on the River Spey, it was a significant improvement on 2014. Indeed, reported rod catches for the Spey amounted to **7,728** Salmon and Grilse caught, which was an almost 70% increase on the 4,563 caught the previous year (Figure 5). Catches during 2015, particularly during the spring fishing, were also more evenly-spread throughout the river between Grantown-on-Spey and Spey Bay than in recent years, which had tended to favour beats in the lower river.

The early part of the 2014 season produced a spring catch (between 11th February and 30th April) of 486 fish, which was below the 578 caught for the same period in 2014. However, catches increased significantly in May with 874 fish caught (c.f. 457 fish in May 2014) and rose to 1,320 in June (c.f. 649 in June 2014). This brought the catch for February – June to a total of 2,680, almost 1,000 fish more than the 1,684 caught during the same period in 2014. The advent of a reasonable grilse run - the first since 2010 - saw a further 1,603 salmon & grilse caught in July (591 had been caught in July 2014) and August proved to be the most prolific month, with 2,002 fish caught (c.f. 1,448 the previous year). Low water conditions in September saw catches fall back to 1,443, but this was still significantly higher than the 840 fish caught in September 2014 (Figure 6).

As in previous years, the catches by river section are depicted in Figure 7, which also show that 2015 was a markedly improved year for salmon angling on the River Spey in comparison to recent years.

Above: *Visiting angler Jeff Hatton with Ghillie Davey MacIntosh, after landing a 14lb salmon at Beaufort pool, Delfur, June 2015.* (Photo: Mark Melville, Head Ghillie, Delfur Fishings)

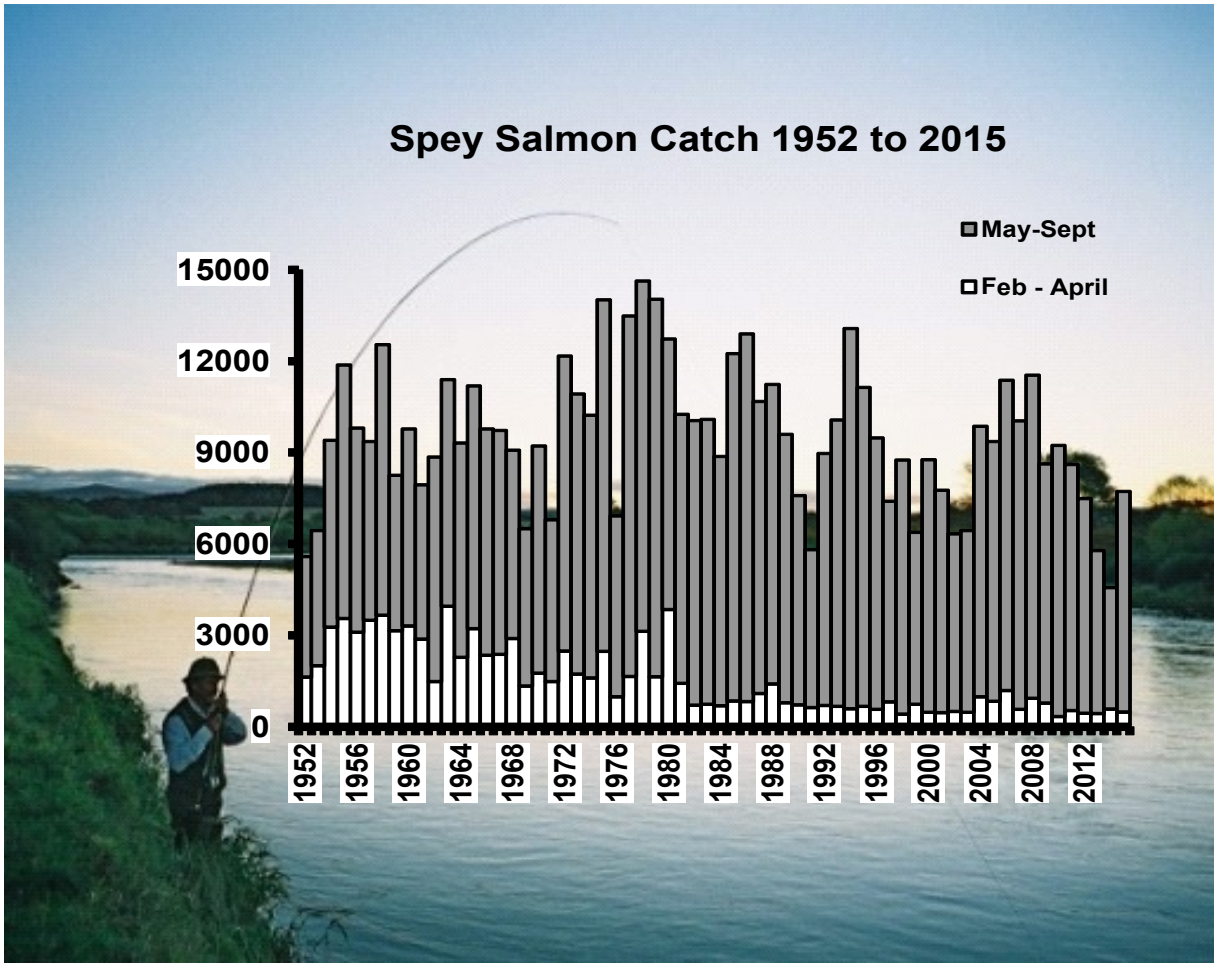

Figure 5: *Annual declared rod catch of wild Salmon and Grilse from the River Spey, 1952-2015. The 2002-2015 catches are from returns made to the SFB by proprietors.*

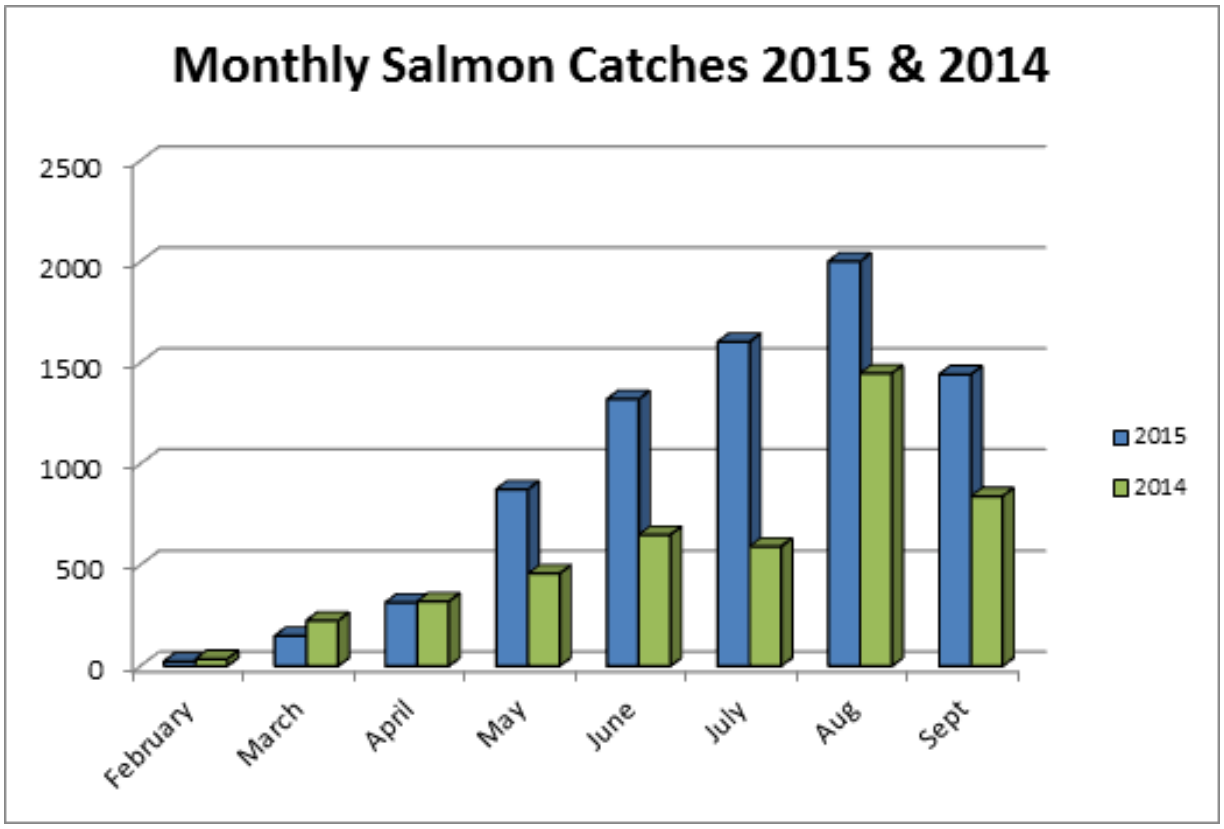

Figure 6: *Declared monthly rod catch of wild Salmon and Grilse from the River Spey in 2015 and 2014, calculated from returns made to the SFB.*

Detailed Catch Returns analysed by River area for the last three years are set out below in Figure 6. The Lower River refers to the River between Inverfiddich and Spey Bay; the Middle River refers to the River between Craigellachie and Ballindalloch, including the River Avon; and the Upper River refers to the River above Ballindalloch.

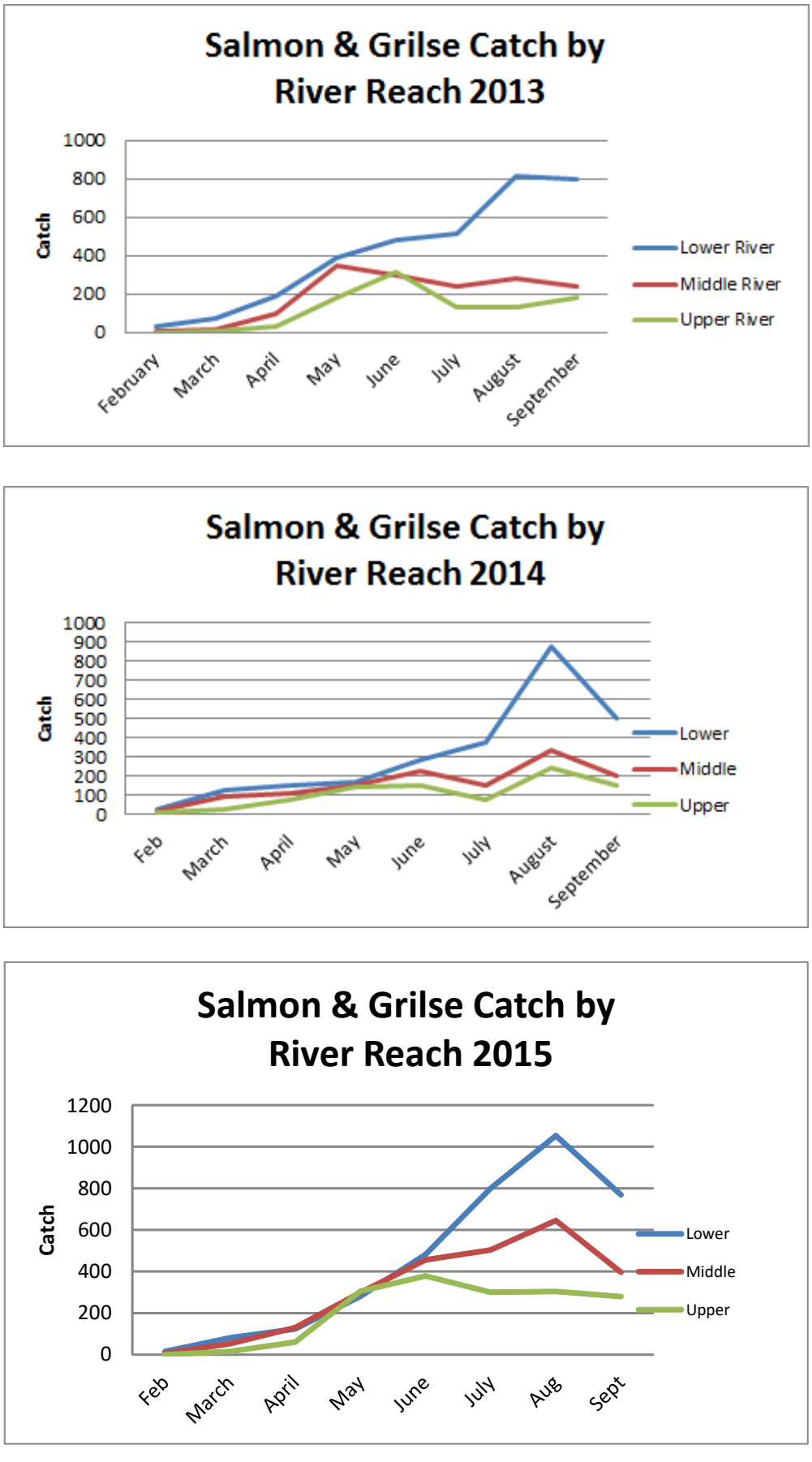

Figure 7: *Salmon & Grilse Catches by River Reach from 2013-2015.*

2.2 Sea Trout Catches

The 2015 declared rod catch for Sea Trout was **2,175** (Figure 8), which was a 13% reduction on the 2,511 caught in 2014, but still a a significant increase on the 1,194 caught in 2013 and the 1,680 caught in 2012.

In common with many previous years (with the exception of 2014), monthly catches during 2015 showed that June was the month when the most Sea Trout had been caught in any one month. 855 Sea Trout were caught in June 2015 (Figure 9), which accounted for 39.3% of the annual catch. July was once again the second highest month, with 662 caught (30.4%). Overall therefore, almost 70% of Sea Trout caught were recorded in these two months.

Above: *This magnificent Sea Trout was caught by Laggan Ghillie, Mike Murdoch, during the spring of 2015. Estimated at 6-7lb, it was one of the* ***2,175*** *Sea Trout caught on the River Spey during 2015.* (Photo: Mike Murdoch, Ghillie, Laggan Fishings)

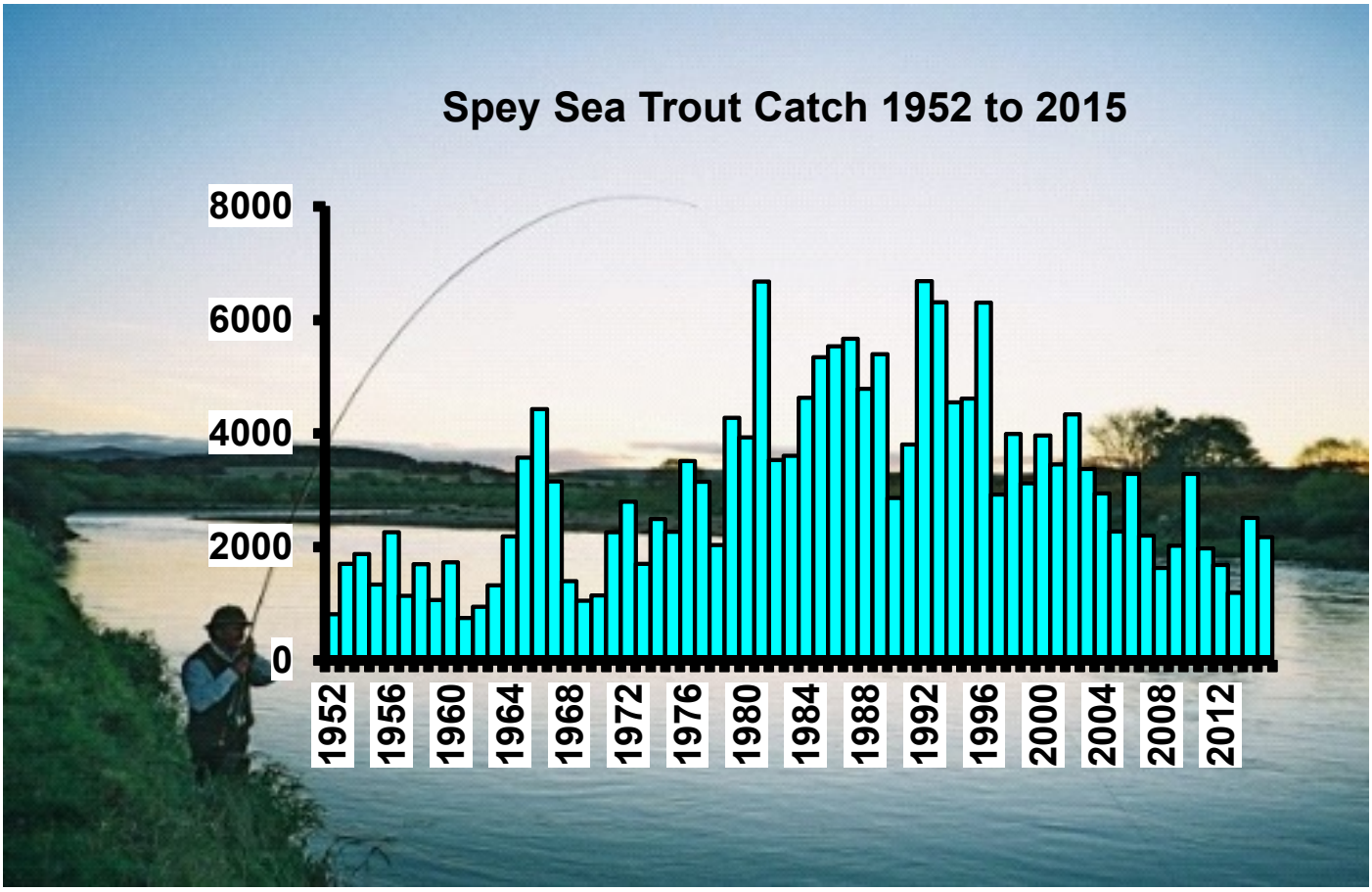

Figure 8. *Annual declared rod catch of Sea Trout from the River Spey, 1952-2015. The 2002-2015 catches are from returns made to the SFB.*

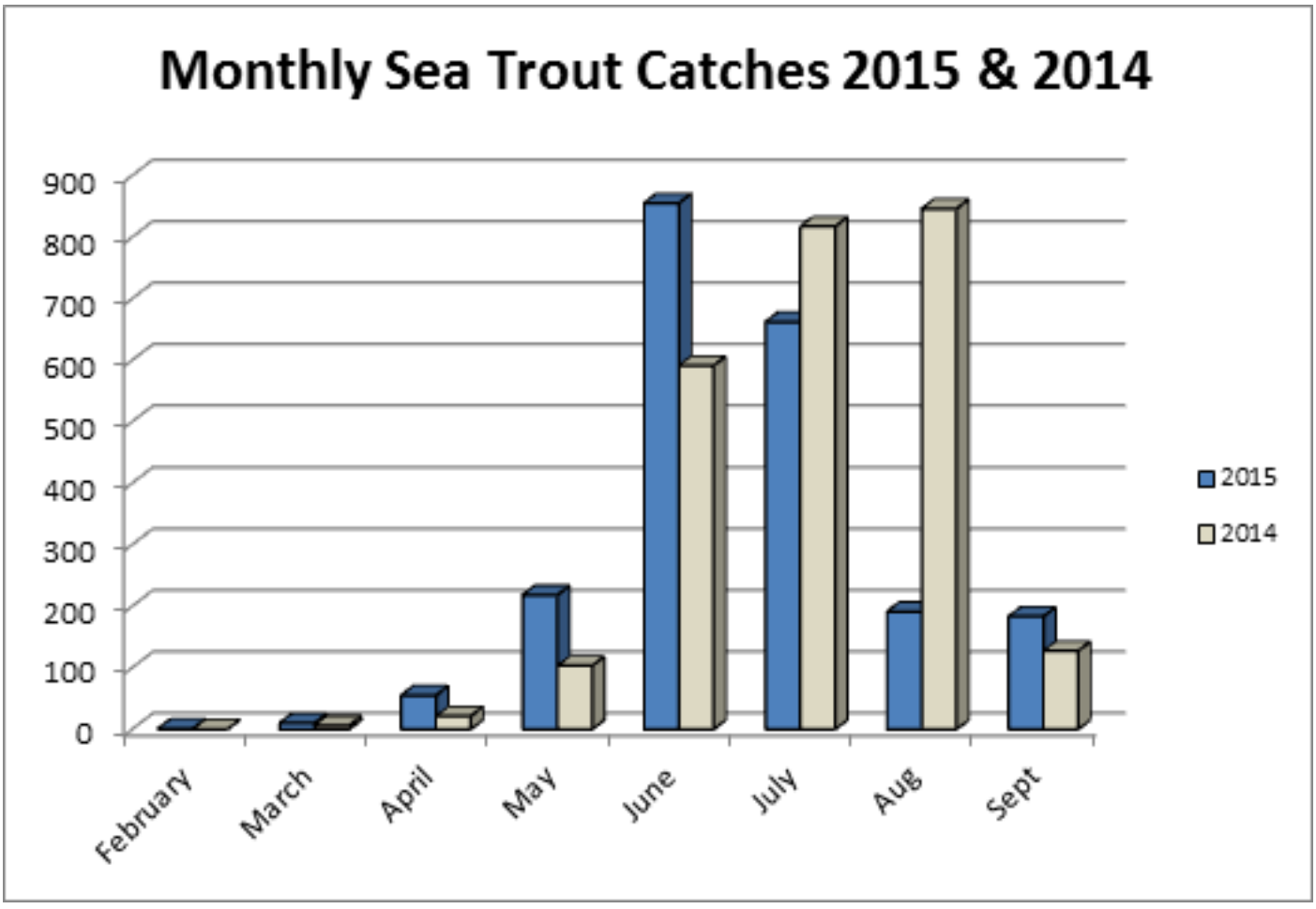

Figure 9. *Declared monthly rod catch of Sea Trout from the River Spey in 2014 and 2015, calculated from returns made to the SFB.*

2.3 Salmon Conservation Policy

As part of its long term commitment to the protection of Salmon stocks, the SFB launched a Salmon Conservation Policy in 2003. The policy aimed to achieve the release of at least 50% of Salmon and Grilse, and to protect the depleted stocks of multi-sea winter Salmon in February-June. It has now achieved a level far higher than what was originally anticipated. Most of the larger fish arrive in the river in the early months and these are the fish which have the potential to make the most significant contribution to successful spawning and are likely to be the fish which spawn in the upper reaches of the catchment. Furthermore, at least 70% of these fish are female, and therefore contribute an important part to the river's spawning stock. Studies by the former Spey Research Trust (now the Spey Foundation) have also shown that these fish are particularly vulnerable to capture and re-capture having been released.

Until 30th April 2015, **over 97%** of all Spring Salmon caught had been released and by the end of June, **over 94%** of fish caught had been released, which was an increase on the 91% for that period the previous year. By the end of the season the release rate remained at **94%**, yet another increase on the overall 92% achieved for the preceding year (Figure 10). For a voluntary policy to achieve such a significant release rate is highly commendable and we are grateful to all proprietors, ghillies and anglers for their support for the policy. In total, **7,229** Salmon and Grilse were released to spawn in 2015.

We reported last year that in October 2014, the Scottish Government had consulted on proposals to make a conservation regulation to protect early-running spring salmon in Scotland. The proposed conservation measure sought to require the release of all rod-caught salmon until 1st April. It also proposed a delay in the start of the net fishing season across Scotland until 1st April , with the exception of the Esk Salmon Fishery District, which would be 1st May. The SFB responded to this consultation, which it felt was a positive development, but one which did not go far enough to protect the fragile spring stock component. The SFB therefore recommended that exploitation be reduced until the 1st June. The Conservation of Salmon (Annual Close Times and Catch and Release) (Scotland) Regulations, as proposed, came into force on 9th January 2015 and henceforth it is illegal to kill wild Atlantic salmon caught before 1st April each year.

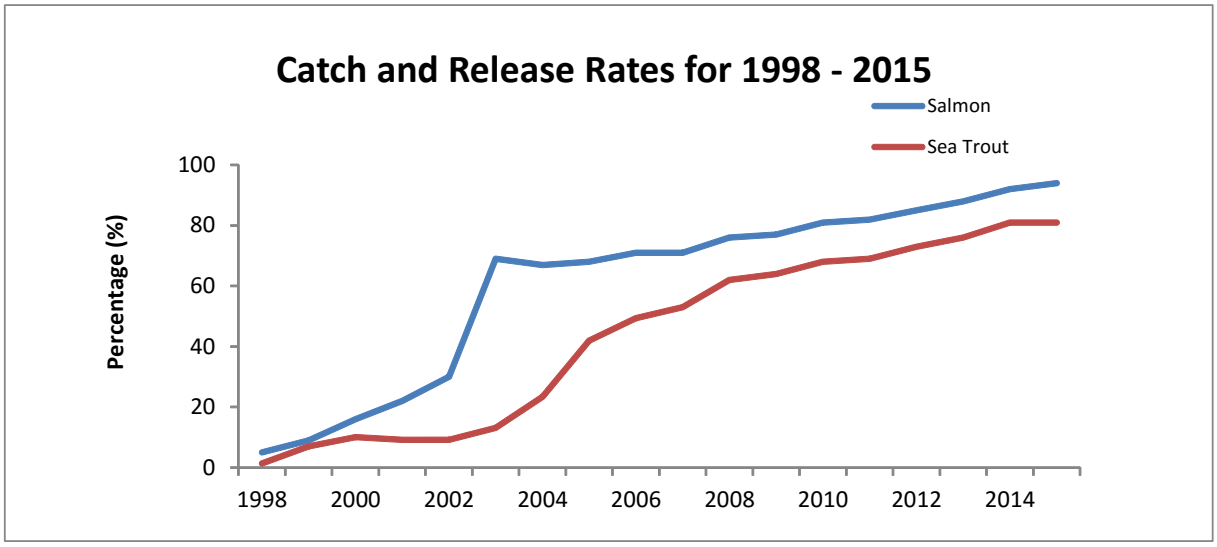

Figure 10: *The proportion of rod-caught wild Salmon & Grilse and Sea Trout released on the River Spey 1998 - 2015.*

Nonetheless, with over 150 fish retained by anglers to the end of June 2014, the SFB remains increasingly concerned about the conservation of the Spring component of the Spey's stock. In order to protect the integrity of the Spey stock and to maximise their spawning potential, the SFB's policy from 2016 is that all fish caught up to and including the 31st May should be released alive. This voluntary Policy is as shown in Figure 11, although it must be stressed that since January 2015 it is illegal to kill a wild Atlantic salmon caught before 1st April each year. The life cycle of the Atlantic Salmon is depicted in Figure 12.

2.4 Sea Trout Conservation Policy

Under fisheries legislation Sea Trout have the same legal status as Salmon, and District Salmon Fishery Boards are also responsible for their protection and enhancement. Catch statistics show that the Spey Sea Trout rod fishery has historically been one of the largest in the UK.

An International Sea Trout Symposium in 2004 made the following key points, which are still valid today:

- *Sea Trout are the sea-running form of Brown Trout;*
- *Sea Trout and Brown Trout interbreed;*
- *The majority of Sea Trout are female;*
- *Unlike Salmon, Sea Trout can return to spawn up to 10 times;*
- *Because of their large size, female Sea Trout provide most of the Trout eggs laid in a river;*
- *Genetic studies show that larger, longer-lived Sea Trout produce young that are also likely to grow large;*
- *Finnock are Sea Trout in their first year after leaving the river as smolts;*
- *Some Finnock enter rivers in the summer/autumn, and some of these breed;*
- *Interbreeding with stocked 'domestic' Trout may interfere with Sea Trout genetics;*
- *Sea Trout and Brown Trout should be managed jointly;*
- *Since Sea Trout are largely coastal, they are barometers of the health of the local marine environment.*

Although catches in the last two years have shown an improvement in the numbers of Sea Trout being caught, they have generally not been encouraging in recent years and the SFB has maintained a precautionary approach. The SFB introduced a Sea Trout Conservation Policy for the Spey rod fishery in 2004, which was designed to encourage the catch and release of Finnock and larger adult Sea Trout. In 2008, the then Spey Research Committee (now the Spey Foundation Committee) had reviewed the Sea Trout Conservation Policy in light of the reduced catch and recommended to the Board that the Policy be enhanced. These recommendations were unanimously supported by the Board and a revised Sea Trout Conservation Policy has been adopted since 2009.

2015 saw the rate of catch and release for Sea Trout remain constant at **81%**, having risen year-on-year since the Conservation Policy's inception (Figure 10). When it was reviewed during 2015, the Board decided that in line with its precautionary approach, the voluntary policy was working well and should remain unchanged for 2016. The SFB will continue to monitor the situation throughout 2016.

The life cycle of the Sea Trout is illustrated in Figure 13.

Spey Conservation Policy 2016

SPEY FISHERY BOARD RESEARCH OFFICE
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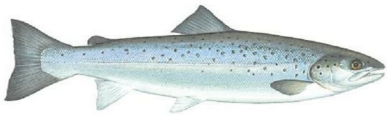
Scottish legislation requires that all salmon caught before the 1st April must be released. In order to protect the integrity of the Spey stock and to maximise their spawning potential, the Spey Fishery Board's policy is that all fish caught up to and including the 31st May should be released alive. From the 1st June the policy set out below will apply.

SEA TROUT

Release all finnock of 16oz / 35cm / 14" or less



Release all Sea Trout of 3lb / 50cm / 20" or above

Retain only 1 Sea Trout of takeable size per calendar day. Anglers are also encouraged to release their first fish and keep the second that is of takeable size

Release all stale or coloured fish

Release all unseasonable fish (smolts, kelts, over-wintered finnock)

SALMON

Each angler must return the 1st, 3rd, 5th etc... cock fish caught

All hen salmon and hen grilse must be released

Throughout the season all stale or unseasonable fish must be released e.g. gravid, kelts

Escaped farmed salmon must be retained

Figure 11: *The Spey Fishery Board's Conservation Policy from 2015.* ***N.B. With effect from January 2015, it is illegal to kill wild Atlantic salmon caught before 1st April .***

Figure 12: *The Life Cycle of the Atlantic Salmon. (Image courtesy of the Atlantic Salmon Trust).*

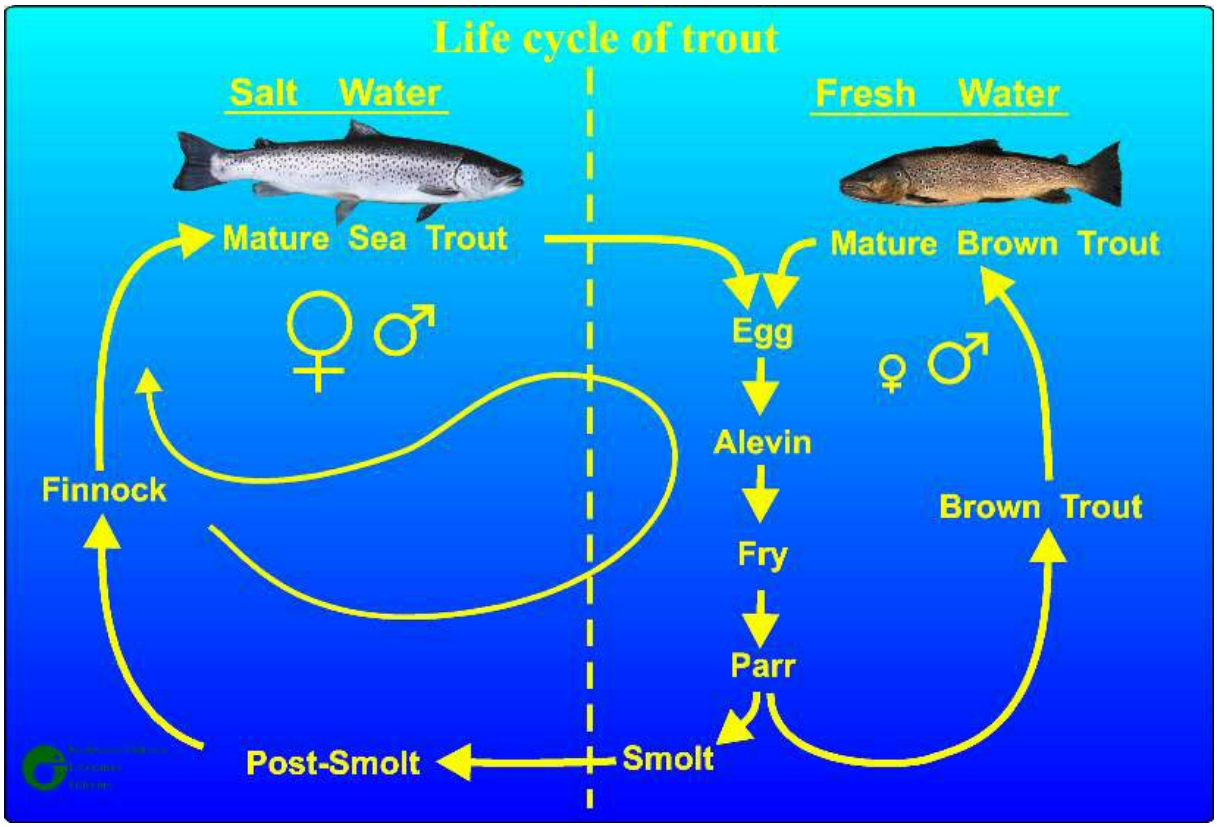


Figure 13: *The Life Cycle of the Sea Trout.*

2.5 FishPal Malloch Trophy Challenge and FishPal Junior Malloch Competition

The Malloch Trophy, now sponsored by FishPal, is the most prestigious Salmon trophy in Europe. It is awarded annually to the captor of the best salmon caught in Scotland on a fly and safely returned to the water. Its main aim is to promote the conservation of salmon through catch and release on Scottish rivers. Robert Rattray, Secretary of the FishPal Malloch Trophy, added: "This season was the third since the Committee widened the criteria for deciding the annual winner. The size of the fish is not the only factor (although this is still important) when we consider all the available evidence. Other factors such as the time of year of capture, the condition of the fish and how it is handled – in line with best catch and release practice – are also taken into account".

The Winner each year will have his/her name and the details of the river and size of fish engraved on The FishPal Malloch Trophy. The Trophy is displayed throughout the year within the fishing department of the House of Bruar, Blair Atholl, Perthshire. The winner will also receive a replica Malloch Trophy, a Mackenzie DTX rod, a £250 FishPal voucher and a box of salmon flies from Caledonia Fly Company.

In 2015 an exciting new **FishPal Junior Malloch Competition** was introduced by FishPal's CEO, Mark Cockburn, and Tay Foundation Chairman, John Wood. The new FishPal Junior Award hopes to encourage more young people to try salmon fishing in Scotland and increase participation of existing junior anglers. It is open to all juniors aged 18 years or under on the 31st December of that year, who catch and release an Atlantic Salmon on a Scottish river using any legal method.

The main prize for the junior winners is a day's fishing in August at FishPonds on the Tay with tuition from former world Spey-casting champion Scott Mackenzie and head ghillie Iain Kirk. Each junior that attends the day will leave with a rod, reel and line courtesy of Glasgow Angling Centre and a box of salmon flies courtesy of Caledonia Fly Company.

The prestige, and fantastic prizes, associated with winning, or even entering the Malloch Trophy competitions are unrivalled in salmon angling. The Spey Fishery Board would like to encourage more entries from the Spey, especially for the Junior Competition.

Further details can be found at http://www.fishpal.com/Scotland/MallochTrophy/howtoenter.asp?dom=Pal
Please note that qualifying entries will require the completion and posting of a full entry form.

Further details regarding the FishPal Junior Malloch Competition can be found online at: http://www.fishpal.com/Scotland/MallochTrophy/junior.asp?dom=Pal

Part 3

Management Report

3.1 Spey Catchment Initiative

Throughout 2015, the Spey Fishery Board has continued to be the driving force behind the Spey Catchment Initiative (SCI), as well as providing it with substantial administrative and management support. This is a highly effective demonstration of a public/private partnership and it is managed by the Spey Fishery Board. The SCI exists as a result of support from the organisations illustrated below:

Since its inception in 2010, the SCI has enjoyed considerable success delivering a range of multiple-benefit projects, which in turn have enabled the SFB to ensure significant fishery habitat enhancements. These have included river restoration and bankside improvement works, in-river habitat enhancements and riverside amenity works to improve access and enjoyment of the River Spey for local communities.

The SCI's remit is primarily to deliver on four priority themes:

- Planting/safeguarding riparian woodlands and enhancing wetlands.
- Demonstrating natural flood management techniques.
- Developing a better understanding of how the river works. In particular, how mankind's use of land impacts upon the hydrological and geomorphological processes of the River.
- Education, awareness-raising and getting people involved in the catchment.

With the continued support of the Initiative's funding partners, 2015 has seen a range of projects being progressed and delivered. These have included: a catchment-wide riparian audit; delivering a range of riparian enhancement and natural flood management sites; using these sites to educate and raise awareness of good practice; and engaging with the land management community in holistic approaches to catchment management and development. Progress is also being made in developing a catchment-wide study of natural river processes to generate a better understanding of how the river system works.

To date, the SCI has planted nearly 12,000 riparian trees across several sites, thanks to the generous support of the Woodland Trust.

3.1.1 Spey Catchment Management Plan Review

The Spey Catchment Management Plan was published in 2003 and, following a review in 2009, led to the creation of the SCI to coordinate the Plan's implementation. In 2015, the SCI Steering Group decided that a formal review of the Plan should take place. This began in late 2015 and will be completed in the early part of 2016. The SCI is managing and coordinating the review, with SCI partners leading on their own specific areas of expertise. Publication of the review in early 2016 will form the basis for the development of a new Catchment Management Plan, which is expected to be launched in the autumn of 2016.

3.1.2 Tomintoul & Glenlivet Landscape Partnership (TGLP)

We reported last year that in late 2014 it had been confirmed that £2.5 million of Heritage Lottery Funding had been ear-marked for the Tomintoul & Glenlivet Landscape Partnership (TGLP) project, through its Landscape Partnership programme. This included a £171,000 development grant to enable detailed proposals for a wide range of projects over the 195km^2 of partnership landscape area to be developed. It is hoped that this will result in a total investment of £3.6m in the area between 2017-2020.

A package based around the water environment and led by the SCI forms a significant element of the proposals. We reported last year that in the development phase, it was planned to undertake a riparian walkover audit to ground-truth the condition of the water margins. This was undertaken in early 2015. Part of the aim was to develop a better understanding of how this dynamic river system works, so that water flows can be better managed in times of spate. An example of the need for this is illustrated in the photograph below.

Right: *bank erosion along the River Avon following a recent spate. Although erosion is a natural process, it can cause problems with land use. This highlights the need for a better understanding of how man's use of land impacts upon river Processes.* (Photo: Liz Henderson, SCI Project Officer).

During 2015, Envirocentre were commissioned to investigate restoration and resilience-building options for the River Avon between Delnabo and the confluence with the Allt na Glander. Nineteen issues were identified for which solutions are now being evaluated. Three barriers to fish passage within the TGLP area and designs for the easement of these were subsequently added to this study: the Conglass at the Allt na Caber; the Crombie at Allt na Fanich; and the Tervie at Mains of Morinsh.

The SCI is also awaiting the outcome of a Scottish Rural Development Programme (SRDP) application for a water margins "demonstration site of best practice" within the Crown Estate. This will also trial several forms of green engineering. An event for farmers was held in November 2015 to encourage similar applications in the area, with the aspiration that the TGLP delivery phase, if the bid is successful, will fund assistance with applications.

Riparian tree coverage maps have also been produced by the SCI for the whole TGLP area and potential tree planting areas that would enhance in-stream water shading have been identified. Work is now underway with the Crown Estate to establish priority planting sites, with the aspiration of planting 20,000 broadleaf trees during the delivery phase (2017-20).

An additional project, focusing on improving fishing access, particularly for disabled anglers, is also currently being evaluated. The Stage Two application will be submitted in March 2016.

3.1.3 Allt a'Mharcaidh

We reported last year on the project to improve the Allt a'Mharcaidh, which is a tributary of the River Feshie and which flows through the Invereshie and Inshraich National Nature Reserve (NNR), close to the village of Kincraig. Approximately 1.2km of its lower reaches had been artificially canalised in the early 1800's, so as to make it easier to float logs from the area down to the River Spey and on to the former ship-building industry at Garmouth and Kingston. Over time, this section had incised, then undercut its banks and the riverbed had been scoured of much of its sediment. The project aimed to redress these morphological pressures and to restore the burn to a more naturally-functioning watercourse, thereby improving its in-stream habitat.

Using low impact, low cost mechanisms, an environment was created that will be conducive to the re-establishment of natural river processes that will, over time, improve the morphology of this section of burn. This approach has been successfully implemented on other projects in the Spey Catchment in recent years. To this end, woody debris features (sometimes referred to as "soft engineering") were introduced along the length of the reach, sediment sources were exposed and embankments lowered at key locations. Together, these measures were expected to instigate natural processes such as erosion and deposition and encourage the creation of in-stream features such as pools and riffles. In time, this will lead to improved "in-river conditions" that should have a positive impact on river functioning, improved habitat for salmonid species, aquatic features and enhanced biodiversity.

The river morphology improvement works also formed part of a larger project across the whole of the NNR. Drains in the surrounding habitat were blocked to encourage water storage, which will enhance the wet woodland environment. Areas of bare peat have also been stabilised, which should lead to a reduction in carbon loss, as well as increased carbon sequestration.

During 2015, SCI was asked to prepare a Phase 2 package of additional ground works for this site. Large-scale forest harvesting operations in the area have prevented this from taking place during the year, but it is planned to address this during 2016. However, a long-term monitoring programme for the site by University College London has been put in place and their first visit took place in October 2015. Furthermore, and significantly, during a walk-over of the site with representatives of Scottish Natural Heritage in October 2015, a good number of redds were observed. Fish were also seen to be present in the restored section and using the newly-formed in-stream features.

3.2 Spey Action Plan

We reported last year that in 2014 the Spey Action Plan had replaced the former Spey Fishery Management Plan, which had been in place since 2008. The latter had provided a framework within which the Spey Fishery Board could identify target areas for research and apply specific funding. However, it had also been a comprehensive document and it had been decided that its successor would be streamlined into something more user-friendly. The Action Plan which has replaced it, whilst principally for the Spey Foundation, but in close collaboration with the SFB, has allowed us to determine and prioritise our future work.

The Spey Action Plan does not, however, replace the Spey Catchment Initiative. Rather, it focusses on more specific issues directly relating to the management of the Spey's fish stocks. Work on its implementation is under way and progress has been reviewed at the quarterly meetings of the Spey Foundation Committee and the Spey Board throughout 2015.

3.3 Salmon Stocking on the Spey

Historically, stocking has often been the first choice strategy adopted by organisations such as fishery boards to try to improve fish numbers. Hatcheries have been operated on the Spey periodically since the late 1800's, when a large scale hatchery at Gordon Castle reared up to one million fish, although it was discontinued in 1914 after 22 years of operation. In the late 1960's, the fishery board established a hatchery at Knockando, prior to the construction of the current facility at Glenlivet in 2001. Various drivers have prompted the establishment of hatcheries on the Spey, including declining catches, stock components or UDN-associated mortalities.

The Spey stocking policy is reviewed annually by the Spey Foundation Committee, which then makes recommendations to the Board, which may result in a number of refinements and changes.

It is generally considered that there are four different types of stocking:

- **Reintroduction**: with the aim of re-establishing populations in areas from where they have been lost, e.g. salmon stocking in the Thames where there was historically a thriving salmon population.
- **Restoration**: where the aim is to restore populations at low ebb back to numbers back to previous abundance.
- **Enhancement:** the aim is to increase stocks, and subsequently catches, in the catchment above natural carrying capacities.
- **Mitigation:** compensatory stocking to maintain production in areas no longer accessible to migratory fish due to e.g. man-made obstacles.

Back in 2003, the number of salmon stocked on the Spey had been increased three-fold as part of a programme aimed at increasing salmon catches by 8%, using a combination of catch and release, habitat improvements and stocking. The stocking expansion was based on a combination of enhancement and mitigation stocking. The enhancement element focussed on stocking suitable habitat above impassable waterfalls, in effect expanding the range of salmon within the Spey catchment, and in "under-utilised" areas, whilst mitigation stocking upstream of man-made obstacles was also increased.

In recent years the focus has been on mitigation stocking. Whilst mitigation stocking is generally considered acceptable, providing best practice is followed, it is now illegal to stock above impassable waterfalls following implementation of the Wildlife and Natural Environment Act (the WANE Act), which makes it an offence to move a species out-with its natural range. The opportunities for mitigation stocking on the Spey are limited; it is estimated that the proportion of the catchment rendered inaccessible by man to migratory fish is less than 1%, a figure that is slowly reducing as more and more barriers are removed. Hence, we are now in a situation where we have a relatively small hatchery operation, focused on mitigation stocking, mainly in small tributaries in the middle and lower catchment.

The identification of areas perceived to be under-utilised can be difficult and may lead to incorrect conclusions being drawn. There are areas of the Spey catchment which are likely to have always supported only low densities of fish, such as high altitude areas and those with granite geology that support only low productivity, and so to try to improve fish populations in these areas by stocking is unlikely to be productive. Salmon do use these areas in the Spey - we have a strong population of salmon spawning at over 500m (1640ft) altitude, up to over 600m (2130ft) - but these should be viewed as highly specialised and adapted fish that spawn early, hatch late and concentrate their growth in the relatively short summer. Highly adapted populations such as these are particularly susceptible to disruption, be that climate or habitat change, or the introduction of stocked fish from out-with that particular area.

A more sustainable strategy, that will benefit the whole river, is to conserve stocks to ensure there are adequate fish available to spawn, and to ensure that the habitat in the nursery areas is as good as possible, so as to promote enhanced survival through the parr and ultimately smolt stages of the salmon life cycle.

Above: *the SFB's Hatchery at Sandbank, Glenlivet, in 2015.* (Photo: Roger Knight)

3.3.1 Stocking Policy

The Spey Foundation Committee recommended to the Board back in 2011 that a far more targeted approach to stocking than had hitherto been practised, together with a reduced production that could be effectively monitored, should be undertaken. This had followed consideration of the extensive programme of electrofishing that had been undertaken that year, together with the results of the genetic analysis project (see the Annual Report 2013, available on the SFB website, for extensive reporting on this) which had provided an indication of the hatcheries' contribution to the rod fishery.

Another comprehensive programme of electro-fishing was undertaken by the Board during 2015 (see section 4), initially to monitor its stocking in 2014 and to confirm the stocking locations for 2015 (see Table 2 on page 42). To assist future monitoring, the Ghillies once again coordinated the fin-clipping of over 125,000 autumn parr for stocking during 2015, so that hatchery-reared fish could be more readily identified. The Board is grateful to all of the Ghillies and Proprietors who took part in this, and particularly to Ballindalloch Castle's Head Ghillie, Steve Brand, for his work in coordinating it, which highlighted the value of public engagement in our work.

In 2013, the SFB had decided to retain the operation of the hatchery, at broadly similar levels to the current production, for the next five years. However, the Spey Foundation Committee and the Board also had to consider the stocking policy and requirement for 2016. To enable this, the Board reconvened its Stocking Sub-Committee, which considered the results from the 2015 electro-fishing. The Sub-Committee's findings were subsequently presented to and endorsed by both the Spey Foundation Committee and the Board (see Table 3 on page 42). Thereafter, the Board applied for a licence from the Scottish Government to catch and hold broodstock outside the Salmon fishing season. By the nature of the SAC-designation of the River Spey, this application also required an Appropriate Assessment. The Board was granted a licence from the Scottish Government for the collection of broodstock and this began in October, once the 2015 stocking had been completed.

The SFB Stocking Policy remains progressive and will continue to be subject to review in light of new legislation, our ongoing monitoring and advances in scientific research.

3.4 Pollution Incidents

There were no pollution incidents during 2015.

Table 2: Spey Fishery Board stocking numbers and locations 2015. All fish stocked as 0+ parr in September.

Stocking location	Broodstock	Habitat quality	Area Stocked (m^2)	Number 0+ parr	Comments
Burn of Rothes	Lower Spey	Good	7,000	20,000	
Corrie Burn	Fiddich	Good	9,775	15,000	
Dullan Water	Fiddich	Good	40,000	80,000	Adipose fin-clipped
Tommore Burn	Avon	Good	8,800	45,000	Adipose fin-clipped
Batten Burn	Dulnain	Good	8,750	50,000	
Total				**210,000**	

Table 3: Eggs laid down in Sandbank hatchery for stocking in 2016

Source	Number females	Eggs laid down in hatchery
Lower Mainstem	7	42,215
Middle mainstem	7	33,100
Fiddich	15	99,815
Avon	13	72,030
Dulnain	7	36,170
		283,330

3.5 Control of Invasive Non-Native Species

The growth of Invasive Non-Native Species - including Giant Hogweed, Japanese Knotweed and Himalayan Balsam - has been an emerging issue in recent years, particularly in areas of the lower catchment. During 2015, the Spey Foundation secured funding from the Landfill Communities Fund and the Crown Estate to carry out some control of these species in priority access areas used by the public. SFB staff undertook this work, on behalf of the Spey Foundation, between Fochabers and Spey Bay. SFB staff time was subsequently re-charged to the Spey Foundation. The results of this work are illustrated in the photographs below:

Above: *SFB Bailiffs spraying Giant Hogweed, an invasive non-native species near Spey Bay and,* ***Below:*** *the results of their endeavours.* (Photos: Brian Shaw)

3.6 Control of Ranunculus

Ranunculus sp., or water crowfoot, is an invasive aquatic plant species which is non-native to the River Spey. It was accidentally introduced to the river over 40 years ago near Grantown-on-Spey and much of the River downstream of Grantown is now badly affected by this plant.

In the past the chemical Midstream, which contained the active and toxic ingredient Diquat, was used to control Ranunculus. As a result of EC legislation, we are no longer able to use this chemical and so the plant is spreading and in some areas choking the flow of the river. The extensive mats of Ranunculus often accumulate sand and gravel underneath, choking the underlying substrate beneath it. This affects the Freshwater Pearl Mussel and Salmon fry habitat. Alternative methods of control, such as manual cutting and removal or hand pulling, are not considered practical as they are costly, labour-intensive and pose considerable health and safety issues for individuals working in a fast-flowing river.

A Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) Position Paper in 2010 clearly explained how Ranunculus is detrimental to two of the four species (Atlantic Salmon and Freshwater Pearl Mussel) for which the River Spey is designated a Special Area of Conservation (SAC). The SFB subsequently identified the glyphosate herbicide, Roundup Pro Biactive, as a potentially suitable chemical for plant control that had been accepted for use in and around watercourses. The Centre for Ecology & Hydrology had also recommended mixing this herbicide with the agent Top Film, which would help the active ingredients to stick to the plant. However, there were concerns about the application of such herbicides to SAC Rivers.

Over the last two years a Management Group, consisting of SEPA, SNH and the Spey, Dee and Don Boards and Trusts, has been meeting to progress this long-running issue. Following the completion of a literature review as a first step, we reported last year that this Group had subsequently supported an application for a licence for a trial of the herbicide mixture in the River Don. This application was successful and a licence had been issued by SEPA.

The trial which had taken place in July 2014 had had two purposes: the first being to determine if the herbicide was effective at killing the plant; and the second, to analyse levels of the potentially harmful chemical in the water at different locations and time scales. The latter part meant that the study had to be carried out in a non-SAC river, without Freshwater Pearl Mussels. The River Don had therefore been selected as the study site. However, as we reported last year, the investigation into the efficacy of the herbicide works had been hindered by the fact that the ranunculus had already started to die back at the time the study was undertaken, so it had been hard to say whether the plants within the study area had died due to the treatment, or simply under natural processes. Nonetheless, the residue analysis showed that the levels of the active ingredient were well under the Environmental Quality Standards defined by SEPA. This was crucial in providing sufficient information for further studies on the Rivers Spey and Dee, with the ultimate aim of establishing whether the treatment was environmentally safe and effective.

In 2015, and with support from both SEPA and SNH, the Boards applied for a licence to trial the Round Up Pro Biactive and Topfilm mixture in the Rivers Spey and Dee. This application was successful and a licence was issued by SEPA. The trials were subsequently undertaken in both Rivers during the summer of 2015 in ideal conditions. Unfortunately, these trials proved to be unsuccessful in both rivers, although this time the failure could not potentially have been attributed to natural processes.

When the Spey Board met in November 2015 it discussed the results of the trial. It concluded that the Boards and Trusts involved had undertaken all that could be expected of them in trying to identify a solution to this long-running problem. It also determined that the Government and its agencies (SNH and SEPA) were failing in their obligations to prevent the deterioration of a site designated as a Special Area of Conservation and they should now be required to assume a more proactive role in resolving the issue. To this end, the Board resolved to write to the Scottish Government to encourage them to undertake this and reserved the option to complain to the European Commission if progress was not forthcoming.

The SFB looks forward to further progress with this long-standing issue during 2016.

Above: *Ranunculus fluitans in the River Spey, July 2015.* (Photo: Brian Shaw)

3.7 Sawbill Ducks and Cormorants

In November 2014, the SFB had again coordinated a combined application to Scottish Natural Heritage for the Spey, Conon, Ness, Beauly, Kyle of Sutherland, Findhorn, Nairn and Lossie Rivers to shoot Goosanders, Mergansers and Cormorants during 2015. Although one application is submitted, the licence (if granted) provides separate quotas for each river involved, following analysis by Scottish Government agencies of the respective supporting bird count data. This application for 2015 was successful and a licence was issued, with the Spey being granted a quota of 23 Goosanders, 2 Mergansers and 4 Cormorants to be shot between 1 January and 31 May 2015. The latter date is significant because we need to provide additional protection to Salmon stocks during the annual smolt run. Carcasses of birds shot were also collected where possible for submission to the Marine Scotland Science laboratory in Pitlochry for the analysis of stomach contents.

Table 4: SFB Sawbill Count Data from March 2011 to March 2015 and (below) May 2011 to May 2015

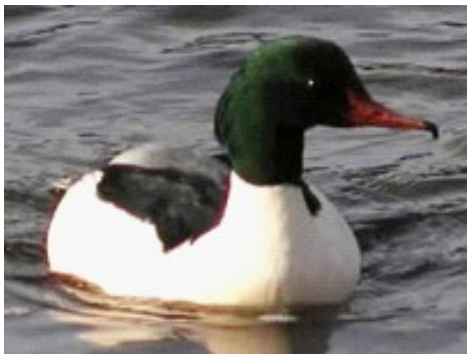
	Mar-11	Mar-12	Mar-13	Mar-14	Mar-15
Goosanders	67	91	56	71	70
Mergansers	9	8	13	4	7
Cormorants	6	10	12	13	2

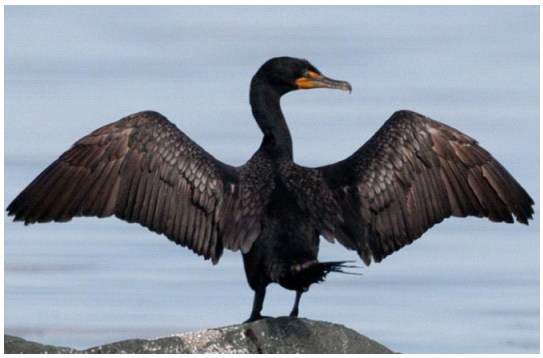
	May-11	May-12	May-13	May-14	May-15
Goosanders	57	70	33	56	41
Mergansers	19	26	2	10	12
Cormorants	0	0	0	0	2

In 2015 the SFB continued counting Goosanders, Mergansers and Cormorants. Counts were carried out from Boat o'Garten to Spey Bay in late March and early May and the data collated, together with that collated during counts in October and December 2014, contributed to our 2015 Licence Application. Table 4 above shows the numbers of birds counted during the SFB sawbill counts in March and May between 2011 and 2015. This data shows that Goosander numbers on the River Spey have been generally stable in March, but slightly declining in May. Merganser and Cormoramt numbers have also been relatively stable. Additional data from other counts during these years is also available, but the timing and number of these counts has not been consistent enough to tabulate for direct comparison. Counts in October have shown the highest concentrations of sawbill ducks on the Spey, which have then gradually declined over the winter and into spring.

The 2015 application again requested that some of these birds be shot during May (licences in some previous years had concluded in April) to provide additional protection to Spey salmon stocks during the annual smolt run. However, as we reported last year, the Management Group that had been formed to consider Integrated Predator Management in the Moray Firth Region (see below), had agreed that from 2015 our licence application should be for a licence to run from October until the following April/May, rather than from January until April/May as had hitherto been the case. Accordingly, the 2015 application was submitted in June, rather than in November.

This licence application was successful and the Board has been granted a licence to shoot 27 Goosanders, 2 Mergansers and 2 Cormorants between 1 October 2015 and 31 May 2016. This is a considerable extension of our licence period and significantly enhances our ability to control pisciverous bird predation on juvenile salmonids in the River Spey.





Above: *The numbers of piscivorous birds such as Goosanders, Mergansers and Cormorants are controlled on the River Spey under licence from the Scottish Government.* (Photos: courtesy of the Science & Advice for Scottish Agriculture agency)

We continue to work towards creating what is anticipated will be a Moray Firth Sawbill Plan, broadly along the lines of the successful Seal Plan for the area (see section 3.8). To assist this, and as we have previously reported, the Scottish Government had granted some funding towards Integrated Predator Management throughout the Moray Firth region and a Management Group had been formed to progress this. Due to the designation of the Inner Moray Firth and Cromarty Firth as SPAs for these species under the Habitats & Birds Directives, future management schemes must consider the potentially conflicting conservation obligations of other relevant authorities for piscivorous birds, against the obligations of District Salmon Fishery Boards (DSFBs) to conserve the fish stocks on which these birds prey. One of the issues facing the licensing authorities is the lack of data indicating whether there is a clear link between the estuarine and riverine populations of Goosanders, and whether birds migrate between these areas. Further work is still required to develop an effective project to progress our knowledge of this bird migration issue and we expect the Management Group during 2016 to continue to consider how best to proceed with this .

During 2016 the SFB will continue to work with SNH, the Scottish Government, the Science and Advice for Scottish Agriculture agency and neighbouring Boards and Trusts to develop this work to establish a Moray Firth-wide management scheme for Sawbill Ducks and Cormorants.

3.8 Moray Firth Seal Management Plan

2015 saw the continuation of the Moray Firth Seal Management Plan, which the SFB has coordinated since October 2013. This Plan licences the SFB and other Fishery Boards around the Moray Firth to shoot Common and Grey seals which have entered the rivers to predate on its Salmon and Sea Trout. It was first implemented in 2005, with the aim of protecting Salmon and Sea Trout stocks whilst also maintaining the conservation status of the Dornoch Firth Special Protection Area (SPA) for common seals. The scheme introduced the novel approach of managing seals and Salmon over a large geographical area, the training of Nominated Marksmen to an agreed standard, and the accurate reporting of all seals shot.

The Moray Firth Seal Management Plan includes the Scottish Government's Marine Scotland, the Sea Mammal Research Unit from St Andrew's University, Scottish Natural Heritage, all of the District Salmon Fishery Boards from the River Deveron around the Moray Firth to the River Helmsdale, and a limited number of salmon net fisheries which are active in the region.

In November 2014 the SFB had submitted a Licence Application for 2015. This application was successful and a licence was issued which permitted the shooting of 45 Grey Seals and 6 Common Seals throughout the Plan area between the 1st February 2015 and the 31st January 2016. During 2015 the SFB shot 1 Common Seal and 8 Grey Seals. Despite our own efforts, though, the allocated quota throughout the Plan's area has not been fulfilled in recent years.

The SFB subsequently submitted the 2016 licence application in November 2015. It has also continued to work towards a thorough review of the Moray Firth Seal Management Plan and will continue to take a leading role in this during 2016.

3.9 Fishery Protection

A Government-sponsored survey conducted in 2003 showed that Salmon and Sea Trout angling on the Spey contributes at least £11.8 million each year to the local economy and supports 367 full-time-equivalent jobs. Poaching therefore not only causes irreparable environmental damage, but also has a significant impact upon the local economy and causes damage to the rural community.

Throughout 2015 the SFB continued to work closely with Police Scotland, with whom we have been fortunate to enjoy close links, in order to control the poaching of these valuable fish. The SFB's Water Bailiffs were also able to undertake some training with Police Scotland in June 2015, courtesy of Balmoral Estate and in conjunction with Water Bailiffs from other, neighbouring District Salmon Fishery Boards (DSFBs). This provided invaluable training in conflict reduction and personal safety, as well as briefings on current wildlife crime trends.

Coastal patrols between the Boar's Head stretch of coastline and Cowhythe Head, using our commercially-coded 6.4 metre Rigid-hulled Inflatable Boat (RIB), were also continued from April-August 2015. This RIB was a significant investment for the Board, but it enables us to conduct patrols along the 20 miles of coastline over which we have jurisdiction. Furthermore, our jurisdiction extends 3 nautical miles out to sea. The coastal patrols require a certain amount of preparation before they can take place and, from time-to-time, poor weather conditions intervene and patrols have had to be aborted. Despite this, over 10 patrols were completed during 2015 to deter illegal netting. Nonetheless, the level of illegal netting along our coastline has historically been prolific before coastal boat patrols were undertaken. The SFB was also contracted in 2015 to undertake two patrols for the Dee (DSFB) and has, in previous years, also conducted patrols on behalf of other DSFBs. Some of these patrols were used to enforce the weekly "slap" time at mixed stock net fisheries, when leaders must be removed, and yielded evidence which was later submitted in court for successful prosecutions. These contracted patrols have also continued to enhance our already close ties with other regional DSFBs and illustrated the value of pooling resources to tackle shared problems, particularly coastal netting irregularities.

There were at least 16 incidents of poaching activity on the River Spey in 2015 which attracted Bailiff intervention. Most of this was small-scale and once again a reduction in comparison to recent years. Even so, whilst the numbers of arrests and convictions may be low, the deterrent effect of deploying a dedicated and professional group of Water Bailiffs should not in any way be under-estimated.

Above Left: *the SFB's 6.4m Rigid-hulled Inflatable Patrol Boat out at sea, with SFB Head Bailiff & Coxswain Richard Whyte and Water Bailiff Jason Hysert.* ***Above Right:*** *The SFB's Water Bailiffs, as well as Water Bailiffs from neighbouring District Salmon Fishery Boards, attended a training course in June 2015 with Police Scotland and courtesy of Balmoral Estate.* (Photo: Roger Knight)

3.10 Administration and Staffing

During the course of 2015, and under instruction from the Board, the SFB's Chairman and Director have undertaken a comprehensive review of the Board's expenditure, in order to significantly reduce costs. This effort was successful and, as a result, the Assessment in 2014/2015 was reduced to 78p/£ from 82p/£ the previous year. Furthermore, the Assessment for 2015/2016 has been set at 70p/£. As part of a package of cost savings, the Board subsequently decided to out-source its accounting and to reduce its Bailiffing resource. This unfortunately led to the redundancy of two of the Board's staff.

Alison Maxwell had been the part-time Accounts Manager for the Board and Foundation since April 2007 and departed in April 2015, following the redundancy of her position. The Board and Foundation are most grateful for her dedicated and loyal service throughout this period and we wish her every success for the future.

Lindsay Grant joined the SFB as a Water Bailiff in August 2003 and he departed in May 2015, after his position was made redundant. The Board is most grateful for his long, loyal and dependable service and we wish him every success for the future.

The Board also bade farewell to Polly Burns, who departed in August 2015 after two years as an Assistant Biologist. Polly has taken up another opportunity in Edinburgh and we wish her every success with her future career. The Board subsequently decided not to replace Polly.

After 20 years of remarkable service, Sir Edward Mountain Bt has decided to step down as an elected Member of the Board. The Board is most grateful to Edward for his enthusiastic and devoted service throughout this extensive period and we wish him every success as he pursues his political ambitions.

James Carr stood down as an elected Member of the Board in May 2015 due to ill health. The Board is grateful to him for his valued contribution and wishes him well during his recovery.

Above: *SFB staff undergoing First Aid Training during 2015. SFB Biologist, Brian Shaw, and Operations Manager, Duncan Ferguson, practise some of the techniques taught whilst Administrator, Sally Gross, and SCI Project Officer, Liz Henderson, question Outwardly Mobile's Instructor, Eric Pirie.* (Photo: Roger Knight)

2015 was a busy year, with a total of 212 electrofishing surveys completed These included 91 salmon fry index surveys in the Spey mainstem and larger tributaries, along with 121 density sites, most of which were in tributaries. The weather was moderately wet throughout the summer, but due to the geographical scale and diversity of the Spey catchment, conditions were suitable somewhere to allow the survey team to operate most of the time. The relatively high river levels that persisted in the mainstem throughout July and August meant that completion of the Spey salmon fry index surveys extended over a longer period than normal.

4.2 Salmon Fry Index

In 2015, 60 timed sites were surveyed in the Spey mainstem, covering the entire river from Garmouth to above Spey Dam. The survey site at Ruthven Bridge, Kingussie, was not surveyed due to restricted access during bridge replacement work. The only other change from previous years was to replace the Truim mouth site with a new, more accessible site a short distance downstream. The River Dulnain salmon fry index sites were repeated in 2012 and the same technique was used for the first time in the Nethy and Druie mainstems.

The Spey salmon fry index classification is now based on an average of the 2012 to 2015 surveys. There has been a general increase in the quintile breakpoints since the classification system was introduced in 2012. For example, the breakpoint between the moderate and good categories has increased from 14.4 in 2012 to 20.0 in 2015. This will be partially due to the expansion of the salmon fry index surveys into the larger tributaries, but also due to improved fry counts in the Spey mainstem since 2012. The results are colour coded into quintiles (20% bands) according to the table below.

Table 1: Spey salmon fry index classification scheme 2012/15

2012/15 Salmon fry breakpoints (No/min)	Classification
0.0	Absent
< 6.33	E – Very low
6.33 – <13.0	D - Low
13.0 – <20.0	C - Moderate
20.0 – <31.0	B - Good
>31.0	A - Excellent

The results from the Spey mainstem salmon fry index surveys are shown in the table on the next page.

During these surveys salmon parr, and other fish species, are also caught. Over the last four years the parr counts have shown a higher degree of variability than the fry counts. Following two years with higher parr counts, the count in 2015 was lower with a mean of 1.5/minute. Whilst these surveys primarily target salmon fry, the parr results are considered to be a fair reflection of the actual situation in the river with this finding matching that from many of the tributary surveys.

Table 2: Spey mainstem mean salmon parr counts per minute during salmon fry index surveys.

	Salmon parr/minute			
River	2012	2013	2014	2015
Spey	1.2	4.3	3.8	1.5

Table 3: Spey mainstem salmon fry counts per minute 2012/13/14/15. Results ordered in an upstream direction.

Site code	Location	2012	2013	2014	2015
S007R1	Gordon Castle	24.7	22.7	16.3	27.3
S012R1	Gordon Castle	11.3	17.0	17.3	20.3
S017L2	Gordon Castle	31.7	52.7	24.7	20.0
S019L2	Gordon Castle	13.3	57.7	28.7	34.7
S025L1	Gordon Castle	7.7	26.0	23.0	26.0
S029L1	Orton Water	6.3	41.0	15.0	31.7
S032L1	Orton Water	9.0	44.0	17.7	28.3
S034R1	Delfur	19.7	12.0	55.0	27.0
S040L1	Delfur	6.7	14.0	13.3	22.0
S040L2	Delfur		90.0	66.0	29.0
S042L1	Rothes	7.7	44.0	10.3	14.7
S047L1	Rothes	6.3	9.3	9.0	18.3
S050R1	Arndilly	13.7	29.7	28.3	16.0
S052L1	Arndilly	15.7	15.7	19.7	23.7
S056L1	East Elchies	17.7	34.7	43.7	39.7
S059R1	Craigellachie	36.7	28.3	33.3	23.0
S060R1	Craigellachie	13.0	12.3	23.0	11.7
S061R1	Craigellachie	20.3	12.3	22.0	10.0
S066R1	Aberlour	10.0	15.3	27.7	17.0
S068R1	Kinermony	3.3	7.3		
SO86L1	Wester Elchies		15.7	12.0	9.3
S071R1	Delagyle	7.0	6.3		
SO72L2	Wester Elchies		19.3	7.3	28.3
S074L1	Laggan	7.0	5.3	9.0	13.7
S077L1	Laggan	36.7	10.0	31.3	27.7
S079R1	Carron	15.7	31.0	16.3	18.3
S082L1	Knockando	8.3	9.3	17.7	15.0
S087L1	Phones		3.7	6.0	4.7
S093R1	Lower Pitchroy	21.3	25.7	20.3	41.7
S096R1	Ballindalloch	11.0	20.0	49.0	37.0
S104L2	Ballindalloch	20.3	61.3	40.7	43.0
S105L2	Tulchan D	35.0	65.7	33.7	45.7
S112L1	Tulchan C	10.3	35.0	11.3	31.3
S119L1	Tulchan B	28.0	30.7	10.0	27.7
S124R1	Tulchan A	13.0	38.0	14.7	18.7
S131L1	Castle Grant 3	29.0	40.0	21.0	34.3
S135L1	Castle Grant 2	17.7	44.0	36.3	20.0
S141L1	Castle Grant 1	3.7	8.0	9.3	17.0
S147L1	SAIA	11.0	17.3	16.0	45.3
S149L1	SAIA	12.0	10.3	14.7	21.7
S163L1	Abernethy AA	33.7	73.3	59.3	28.0
S177L1	Abernethy AA	23.0	53.0	24.0	31.0
S183L1	Kinchurdy	5.7	45.0	21.0	29.7
S195L1	Aviemore AA	14.0	36.0	13.7	11.0
S209L1	Kinrara	19.0	28.3	13.3	19.3
S212R1	Kinrara	16.0			
S215L1	Dalraddy	24.3	63.3	47.7	24.0
S243R1	Badenoch AA	8.7	14.3	17.7	
S254R1	Badenoch AA	6.0	8.0	18.3	10.7
S258L1	Badenoch AA	12.7	11.0	19.3	5.7
S260L1	Badenoch AA				20.7
S264R1	Truim	22.0	4.3	5.3	
S282R1	Laggan	19.7	17.7	18.7	26.0
S287L1	Laggan	12.3	21.3	14.7	5.0
S290L1	Below Spey Dam	18.0	25.0	5.7	8.0
S298R1	Glenshirra	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.3
S305L1	Garvamore	3.3	3.7	0.0	2.7
S305L2	Garva Bridge	1.3	1.3	0.0	1.0
S311L1	Upper Spey	4.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
S312L1	Upper Spey	4.7	0.0	0.0	0.3
S315L1	Upper Spey	5.7	0.0	0.0	8.0
S317L1	Upper Spey	7.0	0.0	0.0	1.0
S318L1	Upper Spey	3.0	0.0	0.0	0.3
S319R1	Upper Spey	0.7	0.0	0.0	0.0
S326L1	Upper Spey	5.7	0.0	0.0	0.0
S328R1	Upper Spey	0.0	*		
Mean		13.6	23.6	18.8	19.6

With four years salmon fry index surveys completed in a consistent manner some features of the Spey mainstem fry population are becoming apparent:

- The overall results have been quite consistent, particularly in the last three years during which period no significant differences between the mean fry counts occurred.

- The lower and middle reaches generally produce the highest counts. This is a reflection of spawning habitat availability and survey site suitability for fry.

- Availability of local spawning gravels is the most likely explanation for the consistent low fry counts at the Phones site. Suitable spawning habitat is present upstream and downstream and at these sites fry counts were moderate to excellent in 2015.

- The results in the upper river from Kingussie to Spey Dam (sites S254 to S290) have been amongst the most variable over the years with the 2015 average counts from that part of the river the lowest since 2012.

- The presence of salmon fry at 70% of the survey sites upstream of Spey Dam show that some adult salmon were able to pass the dam and spawn successfully in 2014. However all but one of the counts were in the very low category, indicative of a low spawning stock. SEPA have now classed Spey Dam as a barrier to fish passage, providing the improvement driver that is required.

As in previous years we can conclude from these surveys that salmon fry (and therefore spawning) are widely distributed throughout the Spey mainstem with recruitment only a significant issue upstream of Spey Dam.

Table 4: 2015 Salmon fry index results from the Dulnain, Nethy and Druie.

Site code	River	Location	2015	2012
TSD02	Dulnain	Upstream railway line	15.3	
TSD05	Dulnain	Upstream Dulnain Bridge	35.3	32.0
TSD09	Dulnain	Balnain bridge 15M U/S	38.3	24.7
TSD18	Dulnain	Wester Gallovie farm	43.3	31.3
TSD21	Dulnain	Duthil Church	74.7	33.3
TSD26	Dulnain	Lochanhully	13.3	
TSD30	Dulnain	Allt Beag footbridge	15.7	13.0
TSD34	Dulnain	Feith Mhor	8.7	17.7
TSD41	Dulnain	Inverlaidnan Bridge	5.7	2.3
TSD45	Dulnain	200m upstream Dalnahaitinch	14.3	6.7
TSD48	Dulnain	40m d/s watergate	7.7	5.0
TSD52	Dulnain	600m d/s Eil	8.0	7.7
TSD55	Dulnain	At Kinrara gate u/s Eil	2.0	5.0
TSD67	Dulnain	Upstream Feithlinn confluence		1.3
TSD73	Dulnain	Suspension Bridge	0.3	
TSD88	Dulnain	Pitmain Bothy	0.0	2.3
Mean			18.8	14.0

Site code	River	Location	2015
TSN03	Nethy	Coulnakyle	90.7
TSN08	Nethy	Behind Dell Cottage	35.7
TSN18	Nethy	Forest Lodge	9.7
TSN23	Nethy	Inchtomach	13.0
TSN31	Nethy	Below Bynack waterfall	7.7
Mean			31.3

Site code	River	Location	2015
TSDR03	Druie	Rothiemurchus Centre	18.0
TSDR06	Luineag	300m u/s confluence	13.7
TSDR14	Luineag	u/s Island	15.3
TSDR17	Luineag	Badaguish below embankment	20.7
TSDR25	Allt Mor	Corner with willow spilling	16.7
TSDRA01	Am Beanaidh	Opposite top end of Caravan Park	3.3
TSDRA08	Am Beanaidh	170m u/s Cairngorm FootBridge	1.7
TSDRA12	Am Beanaidh	Below island	4.0
TSDRA18	Am Beanaidh	Above first ford	20.3
TSDRA22	Am Beanaidh	Above Beanaidh Bheag	9.3
TSDRA29	Am Beanaidh	Below Loch Einich	3.0
Mean			7.0

The results of the salmon fry index surveys in the Dulnain, Nethy and Druie provide an indication of salmon spawning success in some of the larger Spey tributaries in 2015.

The Dulnain sites surveyed in 2012 were repeated in 2015, with the addition of two sites to complete the geographical coverage and one replacement in a more accessible location. The table opposite shows that the general pattern was similar to 2012 with the highest fry abundance downstream of Carrbridge. The mean number was higher in 2015 but the overall impression was one of stability.

As the River Nethy is a smaller tributary only five salmon fry index surveys were completed. The results were variable with the normal pattern of higher counts in the lower reaches pertaining. The result from site TSN03 was one of the top five salmon fry counts within the Spey catchment. Salmon fry were found to be present throughout the accessible reaches of the Nethy.

The results from the Druie and tributaries highlighted the differing nature of the rivers found within this catchment. The Luineag, which lies downstream of Loch Morlich, supported consistent moderate to good salmon fry counts. The Am Beanaidh, a steeper tributary of the Druie draining Loch Einich, supported much lower counts with the best result from the, less steep, middle reaches.

Above: *Typical stable habitat in the River Luineag.* (Photo: Brian Shaw)

Above: *Typical habitat in the more unstable Am Beanaidh, a higher gradient and more mobile tributary of the River Druie.* (Photo: Brian Shaw)

4.3 Tributary surveys 2014

2015 was the fourth year of the three year rotational survey programme introduced in 2012. Consequently in 2015 the surveys completed in the Dulnain, Nethy and Druie catchments in 2012 were re-surveyed providing an opportunity to assess trends in the juvenile stocks. In addition a selection of burns flowing directly into the Spey were also re-surveyed along with contract monitoring sites.

Most sites were surveyed using the single run Scottish Fisheries Coordination Centre (SFCC) area based protocol, with some sites surveyed using multiple runs to allow estimates of total fish densities to be produced. Note that the results from these surveys are expressed as fish captured per $100m^2$ and coloured coded in accordance with the Moray Firth regional classification corrected for stream width. Full details of the 2014 juvenile survey can be found at http://www.speyfisheryboard.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Spey_2015_electrofishing_survey.pdf . Some examples of the results are provided below.

Table 5: River Dulnain and tributaries electrofishing survey results 2015. Results are expressed as fish density/100m2 and colour coded according the SFCC Moray Firth Region classification.

Site Code	Date	Location	Area m2	Salmon fry	Salmon parr	Trout fry	Trout parr
SD09	23/09/2015	Dulnain at Balnaan Bridge	112.1	159.7	19.6	5.4	0.0
SD41	23/09/2015	Dulnain at Inverlaidnan Br.	199.8	30.0	8.0	5.0	1.5
SD45	23/09/2015	Dulnain at Dalnahaitnach	226.2	48.6	11.9	1.8	0.0
SD73	17/08/2015	Dulnain at Suspension Bridge	172.1	8.7	1.2	2.9	1.2
SD88	15/09/2015	Dulnain at Pitmain Bothy	79.6	0.0	1.3	6.3	10.0
SDAHa	23/07/2015	Auchnahannet Burn below farm	81.1	233.0	39.0	16.0	27.1
SDAHb	23/07/2015	Auchnahannet Burn between bridges	64.8	54.0	43.2	18.5	13.9
SDAHc	23/07/2015	Auchnahannet Burn upper	60.2	83.1	1.7	74.8	38.2
SDDUa	29/07/2015	Duthil Burn above road	109.4	181.0	24.6	54.8	3.7
SDDUb	27/07/2015	Duthil Burn at Lyndeor	134.2	133.4	13.4	70.8	8.2
SDDUc	29/07/2015	Garrocher Burn at Auchterteang	88.7	5.6	15.8	7.9	21.4
SDBAa	20/07/2015	Batten Burn at watergate	85.4	212.0	23.4	25.8	12.9
SDBAd	21/07/2015	Batten Burn at anthills	98.6	257.6	12.2	34.5	7.1
SDALa	21/07/2015	Allt Lorgy above bridge	119.4	27.6	6.7	7.5	18.4
SDALb	21/07/2015	Allt Lorgy below Lethendrychule	94.9	136.9	13.7	25.2	13.7
SDALc	21/07/2015	Allt Lorgy upstream Lethendrychule	124	25.8	13.7	23.3	5.6
SDALe	21/07/2015	Allt Lorgy below ford	105.3	96.8	13.3	16.1	10.4
SDAAa	22/07/2015	Allt an Aonaich above confluence	119.5	310.7	8.4	57.7	6.7
SDAAb	22/07/2015	Allt an Aonaich above track bridge	93.9	290.0	8.5	38.3	5.3
SDAAd	22/07/2015	Allt an Aonaich at Inscharn	73.6	55.7	1.4	63.9	57.1
SDAAe	22/07/2015	An Leth-allt	58.7	34.1	6.8	8.5	11.9
SDASa	22/07/2015	Allt an-t Slugain Dhuibh	54.5	33.0	7.3	23.8	16.5
SDFLa	17/08/2015	Feithlinn	95	0.0	4.2	7.4	11.6

2015 was a good year for salmon fry in the Dulnain catchment with 78% of the sites in the moderate to excellent categories. For salmon parr 56% of the sites were in the top three categories. One major factor influencing the status of the 2015 Dulnain juvenile salmon population (applicable across the whole catchment) was the impact of the August 2014 spate. The consequent mortality and displacement of juvenile fish (*summarised in the 2014 Annual Report*) may have resulted in reduced parr densities a year later but the 2015 fry appear to have fared well, perhaps as a results of the lack of competition from the older age class. Another feature has been the large size of the parr present. In some sites the densities of pre-smolt size parr (90mm+) recorded in summer 2015 were the highest in recent years, another example of how juvenile salmonids are able to respond to extreme environmental events.

A statistical comparison of the Dulnain sites surveyed in 2012 compared with the same sites in 2015 is shown in Table 6 below. In each category the densities in 2015 were significantly higher (p = or <0.05) than those recorded in 2012.

Table 6: Statistical Analysis of the Dulnain Sites Surveyed in 2012 and 2015

		Salmon fry		Salmon parr		Trout fry		Trout parr	
		2012	2015	2012	2015	2012	2015	2012	2015
Dulnain	Mean	42.5	122.9	8.2	15.6	9.7	23.3	4.1	9.4
	T-Test	0.006		0.02		0.02		0.01	

There were a similar range of results from the Nethy catchment, although it is clear that the trout population was very healthy with 85% of the results in the good or excellent categories.

Table 7: River Nethy and tributaries electrofishing survey results 2015. Results are expressed as fish density/100m2 and colour coded according the SFCC Moray Firth Region classification.

Site Code	Date	Location	Area m2	Salmon fry	Salmon parr	Trout fry	Trout parr
SNO4	17/08/2015	River Nethy at sewage works	113.7	68.7	7.9	4.4	3.5
SN18	03/08/2015	River Nethy at Forest Lodge	122.1	46.7	4.1	18.8	0.8
SN23	03/08/2015	River Nethy at Inchtomach	96.7	38.2	41.4	14.5	11.3
SN32	03/08/2015	River Nethy at Bynack Stable	102	0.0	0.0	19.6	25.4
SNDUa	04/08/2015	Duack Burn above road	67.6	17.7	25.1	34.0	59.1
SNDUb	31/07/2015	Duack Burn at Torehill Road	84.6	0.0	3.5	52.0	33.1
SNDUc	31/07/2015	Duack Burn at Straanruie	88.7	0.0	0.0	49.6	40.5
SNDOa	04/08/2015	Dorback Burn at Lettoch	99.1	73.7	9.1	6.0	4.0
SNDOc	04/08/2015	Dorback Burn at Muckreach	116.7	35.9	9.6	19.9	8.0
SNDOd	04/08/2015	Dorback Burn at Upper Dell	108.4	0.9	24.9	12.9	2.8
SNFAa	31/07/2015	Faesheallach Burn	75.3	25.2	2.7	29.2	1.3
SNCRa	31/07/2015	Crom Allt	67.6	56.2	1.5	41.4	4.4
SNCRb	31/07/2015	Crom Allt	67.1	0.0	0.0	137.1	20.9

The statistical comparison with sites surveyed in 2012 shows that in the Nethy all but the salmon parr densities were significantly higher in 2015. This is shown in Table 8 below:

Table 8: A Statistical Comparison of the River Nethy Sites Surveyed in 2012 and 2015.

		Salmon fry		Salmon parr		Trout fry		Trout parr	
		2012	2015	2012	2015	2012	2015	2012	2015
Nethy	Mean	9.5	31.0	7.1	11.4	4.3	23.6	4.2	20.6
	T-Test	0.049		0.44		0.004		0.01	

In the River Druie and tributaries surveys there were no statistically significant differences between the 2012 and 2015 surveys although in all cases the mean densities were higher in 2015. The results from the River Luineag sites were generally better than recorded in the more mobile Am Beannaidh tributary.

Table 9: River Druie and tributaries electrofishing survey results 2015. Results are expressed as fish density/100m2 and colour coded according the SFCC Moray Firth Region classification.

SiteCode	Date	River	Area m2	Salmon fry	Salmon parr	Trout fry	Trout parr
SDR03	14/09/2015	River Druie, Rothiemurchus Dell	143.8	41.7	9.0	1.4	0.0
SDR14	14/09/2015	River Luineag, 1.5km below Loch Morlich	102.7	37.0	13.6	8.8	0.0
SDR17	14/09/2015	River Luineag, Badaguish	88.6	72.2	13.5	2.3	1.1
SDR25	14/09/2015	Allt Mor, Glenmore Forest Lodge	103.6	22.2	14.4	18.3	3.9
SDR27	15/09/2015	Allt Mor, at chute	115.9	0.0	0.0	0.9	11.2
SDRCa	15/09/2015	Allt na Ciste	66.1	0.0	0.0	7.6	21.1
SDRA08	18/09/2015	Am Beanaidh, Cairngorm Club Footbridge	111.7	5.4	8.1	1.8	0.9
SDRA12	16/09/2015	Am Beanaidh, at island	87.6	11.4	4.6	13.7	3.4
SDRA17	16/09/2015	Am Beanaidh, 1st ford	93.8	21.2	28.7	6.4	4.6
SDRA23	16/09/2015	Am Beanaidh, 2nd ford	121.4	9.1	7.4	1.6	2.5
SDRA29	16/09/2015	Am Beanaidh, Loch Einich	123.3	0.0	13.8	8.9	4.0
SDRAAa	18/09/2015	Allt Druidh at Allt Driue	86.5	4.6	2.3	10.4	2.3
SDRABBa	16/09/2015	Beanaidh Bheag at ford	98.7	9.1	0.0	23.3	2.0

In the surveys completed in the burns the results were highly variable although the densities of trout fry in the burns downstream of Aviemore were notable with all but 3 of the 23 sites surveyed in the excellent category. Trout parr densities were also healthy.

4.4 Avon & Tommore Smolt Traps

In 2015 twin rotary screw traps were redeployed in the lower River Avon (pronounced A'an) during the smolt season. In addition, a fixed trap was constructed in the lower reaches of the Tommore Burn by SFB staff and the Ghillies. This was the first time this had been done in this burn and enabled us to monitor the output from the stocking carried out over the last three years. The Board is grateful to all of the Ghillies who provided assistance and in particular to Steve Brand (Head Ghillie, Ballindalloch Castle) who helped coordinate it.

River conditions were once again good for trap operation, water levels were general higher than experienced in 2014, there were no extreme flow events, and both traps were maintained in operational condition every day.

Above: *Tommore Burn Smolt Trap.* (Photo: Brian Shaw)

The Tommore Burn trap was a complete capture trap with all fish caught processed and released downstream. The Avon traps only sampled part of the run therefore mark and recapture techniques (*described in the American Fisheries Society Salmonid Field Protocols Handbook*) were used to generate an estimate of the 2015 Avon smolt run. This involved a number of individual trials where marked smolts were transported 1.2km back upstream and released.

The number of salmon captured in the Avon trap in 2015 was 5,378, considerably lower than the 14,181 captured in 2014. Trap efficiency was lower in 2015 due to the slightly higher water levels with the recapture trials indicating that the traps were catching one in eleven fish migrating downstream compared to one in eight in 2014. The highest daily total for salmon in the Avon traps was 557 on the 26th April (1,750 on the 5th May in 2014) and the median date (the date when 50% of the smolts were captured) occurred on the 26th April, three days earlier than in 2014. The number of trout marked and released in 2015 was much higher than in 2014 but the recapture rate remained low at 3.3%.

The results from the mark and recapture trials and the smolt production estimates are shown in Table 10 below. The 2015 salmon smolt run in the Avon was estimated at 58,097, which amounted to 54% of the 2014 estimate. This reduction in the smolt run from the Avon was a direct result of the impact that the significant spate which had occurred in August 2014 had had on juvenile salmon.

Table 10: Avon smolt trap mark and recapture run estimates 2015

Species	Total salmon (pre smolts and smolts) captured u_i	Marked fish M_i	Recaptures m_i	Estimate of salmon smolt run	95% confidence limits
Salmon	5,362	1,115	102	58,097	+/- 10,740
Trout	696	214	7	18,705	+/- 12,059

The Tommore Burn trap worked well from the outset with a total of 377 salmon captured, 352 of which were fin-clipped i.e. as a result of stocking in 2013. The other 25 salmon were non-clipped fish and likely to be naturally produced in the accessible part of the burn between the trap and the culvert. Scale readings confirmed that all the fin-clipped smolts were 2 years old. The only three year old salmon smolt was one of the largest and not fin-clipped. The average size of the Tommore salmon pre-smolts and smolts was 111mm, close to the 113mm from the Avon traps. The median date for salmon from the Tommore Burn was the 5th April, and for trout the 30th April.

It is intended to maintain the operation of smolts traps at both locations in 2016.

4.5 Education

The Foundation's education outreach expanded greatly with Polly Burns in place. In 2015 Cullen, Knockando and Aviemore schools participated in the Salmon in the Classroom project. The education element of the "Pearls in Peril" project was delivered across a range of schools along with additional support for specific studies e.g. invertebrate studies or projects such as the Speyside High art project.

The Foundation was active in 2015 with the university sector hosting field trips for Master students from Aberdeen University and University College London.

4.6 Scottish Mink Initiative

2015 was a quiet year for mink sightings and captures. Only two confirmed captures were reported to the Foundation, both by ghillies on the river. Funding for the Scottish Mink Initiative ended in August but the Foundation has agreed to respond to any sightings and maintain contact with the network of volunteers in anticipation of a successful conclusion of the development phase of the Scottish Invasives Species Initiative which will include mink control.

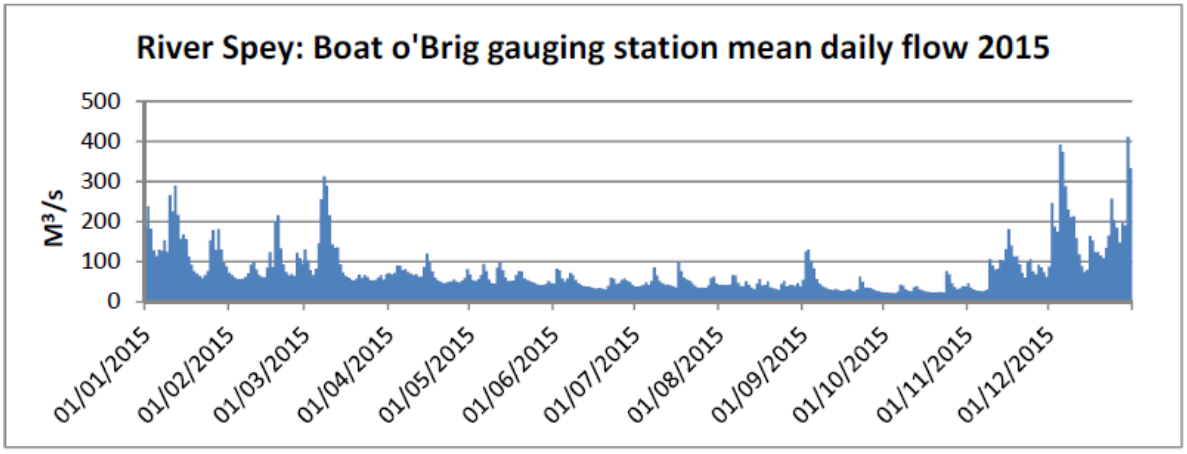
4.7 Fish Passage

The Foundation has continued to work with local industry to improve fish passage at man-made obstacles. In 2015 Speyburn Distillery constructed a low gradient fish pass on the Broad Burn to facilitate fish passage above the distillery cooling water intake. The Foundation had undertaken to provide monitoring and evaluation as part of the sponsorship agreement with Speyburn. Observations of sea trout using the fish pass and redd counts in late November confirmed the fish pass had been successful. Electrofishing will continue over a number of years to monitor the health and status of the juvenile stock.

Above: *Speyburn Distillery fish pass on the Broad Burn, Rothes. (Photo: Brian Shaw).*

4.8 River Spey flows 2015

This feature summarises the river levels in the Spey during 2015. The analysis presented below was based on data obtained from SEPA for the Boat o'Brig gauging station in the lower Spey. 2015 was a year of relatively high river levels and the mean daily flow over the course of the year was 80.1m³/s; a higher average than in any of the last ten years. However, there was only one event when the flow exceeded 500m³/s, the threshold used during the analysis of Spey spates and flows in the August "Tropical Storm Bertha" aftermath. That event occurred on the 30th December, the day when "Storm Frank" caused such terrible flooding across the north east of Scotland. The Spey mainstem itself escaped relatively lightly with the flow peaking at 503m³/s in late afternoon, although very high levels were recorded in eastern tributaries such as the Feshie and Druie.



During the angling season river levels were often excellent, and stable. Flows were above average each month through July with the lowest river levels occurring in August and October. The good spate in early September was followed by a week of great catches although with declining sport thereafter.

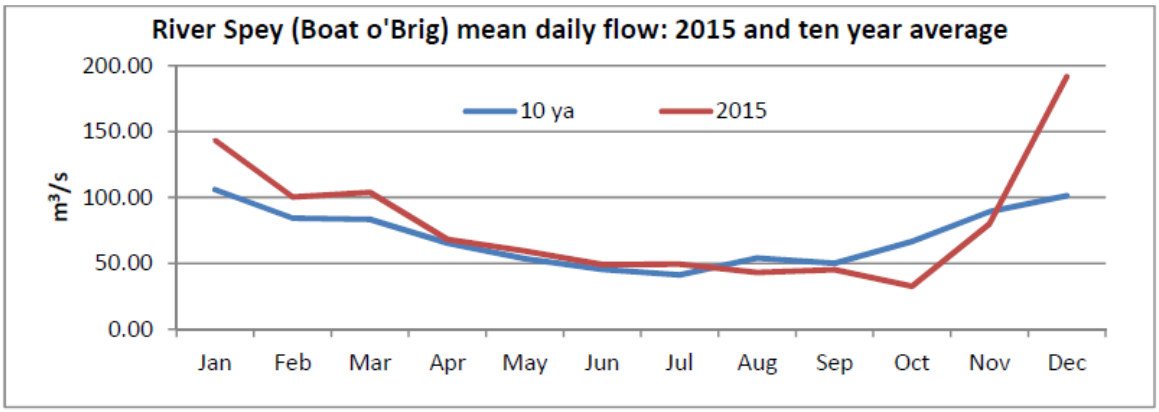


Table 11: Monthly mean daily flows 2015 at Boat o'Brig. Data supplied by SEPA.

Mean daily flow M³/s	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Annual
2015	143.3	100.4	103.9	68.1	59.4	49.1	49.2	43.0	45.1	32.5	79.7	191.6	80.1
10 year ave.	105.9	84.2	83.4	65.5	53.6	45.2	41.1	54.1	49.9	66.5	89.1	101.3	69.7

Part 5

Publicity

5.1 Media Coverage

Both the Board and the Foundation have continued to receive regular media coverage throughout 2015. The improved salmon catches during the season also resulted in more positive coverage than had been the case the year before. Meanwhile, the Spey Foundation's "Salmon Goes to School" project has remained as popular as ever with the press.

5.2 Briefings

Four comprehensive Briefings were published during 2015, with paper copies displayed at ghillies' huts and other distribution via the Board's website. They are available at the following web address:

http://www.speyfisheryboard.com/sfb-publications/

5.3 Website

Weekly updates of catches have continued to be made available on the Board's website throughout the season. The Board is most grateful to Dr Malcolm Newbould for his time and dedication in maintaining this. However, more information and fishing reports from beats (including anecdotes and particularly photographs) would be greatly appreciated. Full details of this, as well as full details about the Board and Foundation and a wealth of research reports, can be found at **www.speyfisheryboard.com**

The "Blog" on the Board's website has continued to enable swift publication of regular accounts of the Biologists' work and the research that is being undertaken. It has continued to be well-received and its popularity grows year-on-year. There continues to be the facility whereby visitors to the "Blog" may leave comments or ask questions, but whilst this does not imply that the Board's website is a salmon forum, it has helped to make our work even more transparent.

5.4 Public Meetings

The Board and the Spey Foundation held their annual local Public Meeting at the Fleming Hall in Aberlour on 20th October 2015. This was attended by approximately 30 proprietors, ghillies and local anglers. The Board's Director, Roger Knight, presented an update on the Scottish Government's proposals for the reform of wild fisheries management (see section 1.6) and outlined the major issues currently affecting the river, with particular regard to water abstraction (see section 1.9). The Board's Biologist, Brian Shaw, also presented the results of our scientific monitoring throughout the catchment during the year.

5.5 Grantown on Spey Show

The Spey Foundation took a stand at the Grantown on Spey Show in July 2015. This enabled our staff to showcase the broad variety of work undertaken by the Board and Foundation to conserve and enhance the fisheries throughout the district.

Left: *SFB Assistant Biologist Polly Burns at the Spey Foundation's stand at the Grantown on Spey Show.* ***Above:*** *The event allowed us to showcase our work to a broad spectrum of local visitors.* (Photos: Sally Gross)

5.6 Committees

Throughout 2015, SFB staff also served on the following committees:

- River Directors' Group – Chair
- Spey Fishing Trust Limited – Company Secretary
- Spey Catchment Initiative Steering Group
- ASFB/RAFTS Joint Working Group on Wild Fisheries Reform
- Moray Firth Sawbill Management Plan Group - Coordinator
- Moray Firth Sawbill Management Plan Group - Coordinator
- Moray River Watch Group
- North East Area Advisory Group for the Water Framework Directive
- Grampian Partnership Against Wildlife Crime
- Spey Users' Group
- Institute of Fisheries Management Scottish Committee

SPEY DISTRICT FISHERY BOARD
INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 SEPTEMBER 2015

	£	2015 £	£	2014 £
Income				
Fishery accessments		458,797		499,832
Other income and Interest receivable				
Recharges to the Spey Foundation	23,398		26,604	
Spey Catchment Initiative	27,978		28,295	
Ranunculus Project	0		4,088	
Other operating income	4,297		3,894	
Interest received	284		464	
Miscellaneous funding	1,200		0	
Inver House alloaction	20,000		0	
Donations to Lost at Sea Film	0	77,157	2,500	65,845
		535,954		565,677
OVERHEADS				
Personel Costs		373,265		389,217
Redundancy Costs		10,968		0
Direct Expenses		51,192		57,747
General expenses		55,427		76,330
Financial Costs		4,424		5,360
Donations to Lost at Sea Film		0		2,500
Spey Catchment Initiative		27,931		28,302
Ranunculus Project		0		6,635
UDN Research Project		4,000		3,008
General Ongoing Spey Projects		801		121
		528,008		569,220
PROFIT/(LOSS) FOR YEAR		**7,946**		**(3,543)**

SPEY DISTRICT FISHERY BOARD
BALANCE SHEET
AS AT 30 SEPTEMBER 2015

	2015 £	2014 £
FIXED ASSETS		
Tangible assets	69,516	115,957
CURRENT ASSETS		
Debtors	74,473	65,172
Bank - Deposit Account	213,705	180,776
Bank - Current Account	26,314	5,272
	314,492	251,220
CURRENT LIABILITIES	(40,841)	(58,952)
NET CURRENT ASSETS	273,651	192,268
TOTAL ASSETS LESS CURRENT LIABILITIES	343,167	308,225
LIABILITIES DUE AFTER ONE YEAR		
HP Creditor	(2,275)	(15,279)
NET ASSETS	340,892	292,946
REPRESENTED BY:		
Capital accounts	38,569	38,569
Current accounts	262,323	254,377
Inver House Designated fund balance	40,000	0
Surplus as at 30 September 2015	**340,892**	**292,946**

1. The above figures must be considered as draft until approved by the Board's Annual General Meeting.
2. These are abbreviated accounts. A copy of the Board's full Financial Statements, together with explanatory notes, will be published on its website (www.speyfisheryboard.com), once they have been approved at the Annual General Meeting.

THE SPEY FOUNDATION
COMPANY LIMITED BY GUARANTEE
COMPANY REGISTRATION NUMBER SC366048
CHARITY NUMBER SC005794
STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES (CONTINUED)
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 SEPTEMBER 2015

	Unrestricted Funds	Restricted Funds	Total Funds 2015	Total Funds 2014
Incoming Resources				
Voluntary Income	**£**	**£**	**£**	**£**
Fishspey Bookings	0	0	0	55
Rotary Smolt trap and trailer donated	0	0	0	10,166
RAFTS - SMI Audit	0	10,127	10,127	10,871
Sponsorship	10,950	0	10,950	10,000
	10,950	10,127	21,077	31,092
Investment Income				
Bank interest receivable	363	0	363	494
Incoming resources from Charitable Activities				
Small contracts	17,111	0	17,111	9,348
Work relating to windfarms	17,284	0	17,284	6,888
	34,395	0	34,395	16,236
Other Incoming resources from Charitable Activities				
Miscellaneous income	451	1,500	1,951	150
Total Incoming Resources	46,159	11,627	57,786	47,972

	Unrestricted 2015	Restricted 2015	Total Funds 2015	Total Funds 2014
Resources Expended	**£**	**£**	**£**	**£**
Cost of Generating Funds				
General running	37,814	1,500	39,314	29,263
Spey Research Projects - General	3,899	0	3,899	6,987
Rotary Screw Traps	0	0	0	2,524
Wind Farms	9,053	0	9,053	6,131
SMI Audit/Initiative	0	2,408	2,408	4,248
Pearls in Peril	0	0	0	2,219
MORL Project	0	0	0	844
Tagging Project	0	0	0	741
Schools and Education	1,540	0	1,540	4,268
Rotary smolt trap	0	0	0	847
	52,306	3,908	56,214	58,072
Governance Costs				
Accounting fees	2,400	0	2,400	2,890
	2,400	0	2,400	2,890
Total Resources Expended	54,706	3,908	58,614	60,962
Net incoming resources for year	(8,547)	7,719	(828)	(12,990)

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THE SPEY FOUNDATION
COMPANY LIMITED BY GUARANTEE
COMPANY REGISTRATION NUMBER SC366048
CHARITY NUMBER SC005794
BALANCE SHEET AS AT 30 SEPTEMBER 2015

	2015	2014
	£	£
FIXED ASSETS		
Tangible assets	13,860	20,653
CURRENT ASSETS		
Debtors	4,817	7,246
Cash at bank and in hand	80,278	72,358
	85,095	**79,604**
CREDITORS: amounts falling due within one year	(14,641)	(15,115)
NET CURRENT ASSETS	70,454	64,489
TOTAL ASSETS LESS CURRENT LIABILITIES	**84,314**	**85,142**
FUNDS		
Restricted income funds	29,010	29,857
Unrestricted income funds	55,304	55,285
TOTAL FUNDS	**84,314**	**85,142**

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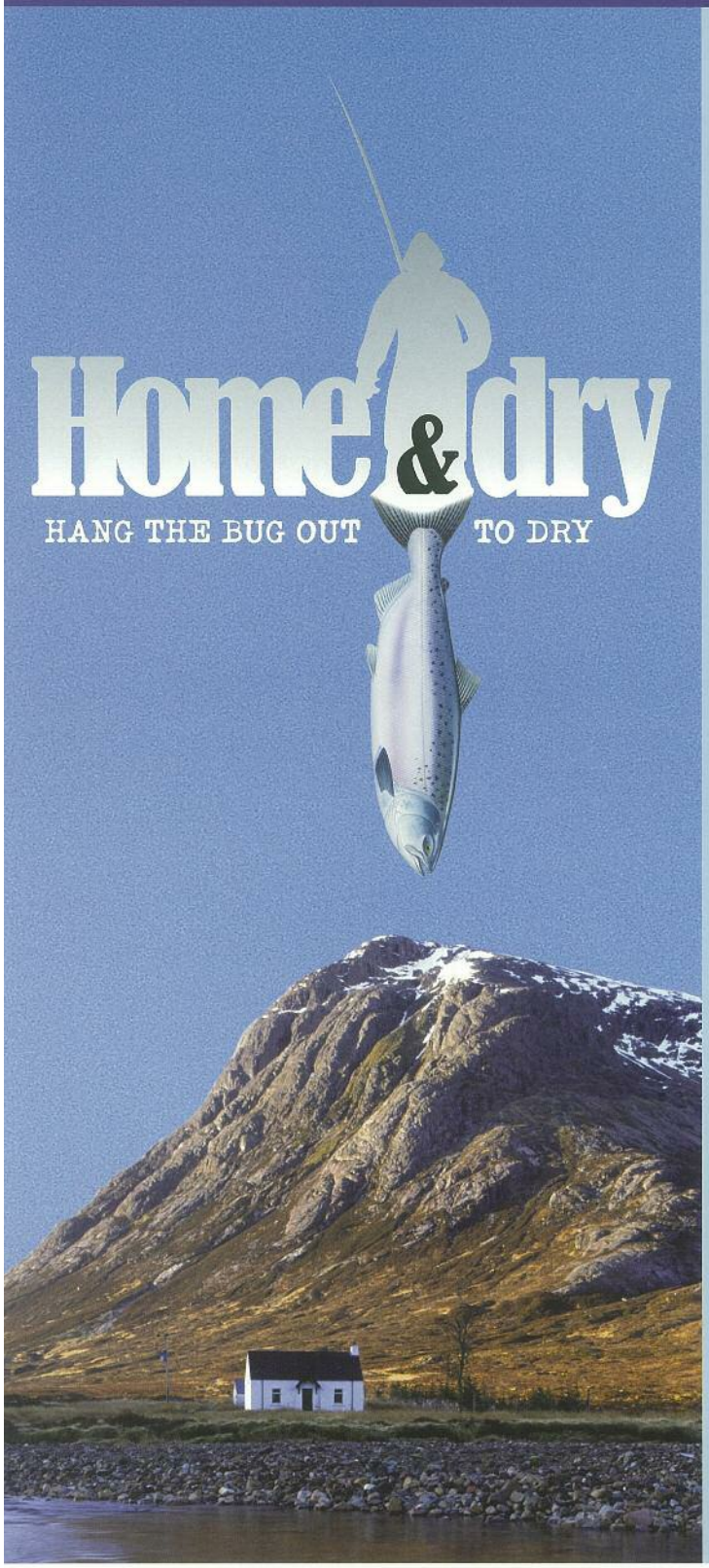

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Just come back from Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Norway, Portugal, Russia, Spain or Sweden?

Ensure your equipment is not carrying the highly contagious Gs parasite which has the ability to wipe out freshwater salmon stocks.

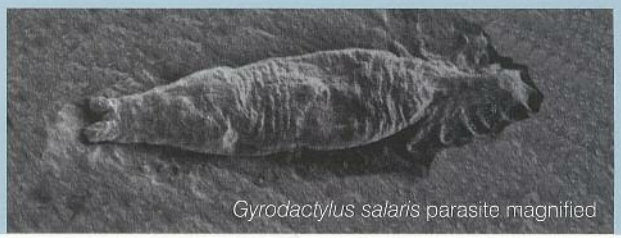
What is the Gs Parasite?

The Gs parasite is a highly contagious bug that has devastated salmon stocks in Norway. We want to keep it out of Scotland's rivers.

Here's what you need to do

To ensure your equipment is not contaminated, please take one of the following precautionary measures:

- Completely dry equipment (e.g. waders, fishing equipment, bags, canoes and windsurf gear) at the minimum temperature of 20° for at least 2 days **or**
- Heat for at least 1 hour at above 60°C **or**
- Deep freeze for at least 1 day **or**
- Immerse in a Gs killing solution for min 10 minutes


Gyrodactylus salaris parasite magnified

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