



SALMON WATCH IRELAND

"Dedicated to the restoration of salmon abundance in Ireland"

Case for Closure of the Mixed Commercial Fishery Below the Glenshelane River Due to Critically Low Salmon Fry Numbers

**Chief Executive Officer
Inland Fisheries Ireland**

Overview

The Glenshelane River, a designated salmon river within the Munster Blackwater catchment, has consistently failed to meet its conservation limit (CL) for salmon. Catchment-wide electrofishing data from Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) reveals persistently low fry numbers since 2007. Compounding this issue, a mixed-stock commercial net fishery appears to operate downstream of the Glenshelane confluence with the tidal Munster Blackwater — an activity incompatible with the conservation of a river that is demonstrably under ecological stress.

Glenshelane River Electrofishing Results (2007–2022)

The Catchment-Wide Electrofishing (CWEF) programme has surveyed the Glenshelane four times between 2007 and 2022. The key findings are:

- **2022 survey:** Mean of **2.44 salmon fry per 5 minutes**, with fry detected at only 6 of 17 sites, confined to the lower reaches.
- **Five-survey average (CWEF index): 9.75 fry/5 minutes**, significantly below the **TEGOS conservation threshold of 17 fry/5 minutes**.
- No indication of recovery has been observed across 15 years of data.

These figures clearly demonstrate that the Glenshelane is not meeting its conservation objectives and that spawning escapement is insufficient to maintain population viability.

The Finisk River: Compounding Evidence of Regional Stock Weakness

Electrofishing has also been conducted on the nearby **Finisk River**, another contributor to the Blackwater estuary. Results from the Finisk show:

- A **salmon fry index of 0.00 fry/5 minutes**, and
- **No valid five-survey average** could be established due to insufficient or poor-quality data.

This underscores a broader regional issue in the catchment — multiple tributaries are either underperforming or have no recoverable fry population, increasing the conservation imperative.

Mixed-Stock Commercial Fishery Risk

The mixed commercial fishery operating below the Glenshelane risks catching salmon from both Glenshelane and Finisk origin:

- These rivers are not meeting their CLs.
- Mixed-stock fisheries cannot selectively exclude salmon from at-risk systems.
- Continued operation violates the **precautionary principle** and undermines recovery efforts for vulnerable stocks.

Scientific and Legal Foundations for Closure

1. **TEGOS Conservation Criteria:** With a CWF index <17, the Glenshelane does not meet the minimum standard to permit even catch-and-release angling. Allowing commercial harvest downstream is clearly unjustifiable.
2. **Article 17, EU Habitats Directive:** Ireland is legally obligated to maintain and restore populations of Annex II species (such as Atlantic salmon) in designated rivers. The operation of fisheries threatening these populations is contrary to the directive.

3. **Prolonged Failure and No Recovery Trend:** The long-term dataset shows no signs of recruitment improvement since 2007.

Recommendation

We strongly recommend the **immediate closure of the mixed-stock commercial net fishery operating downstream of the Glenshelane River**, to prevent further unsustainable exploitation of salmon stocks from rivers clearly failing their conservation objectives. This closure should remain in place until:

- The Glenshelane achieves a sustained five-survey average ≥ 17 fry/5 minutes, and
- Viable fry populations are established in neighbouring rivers such as the Finisk.

Conclusion

The evidence is unequivocal. The Glenshelane and Finisk rivers are in a vulnerable state, with salmon fry numbers far below conservation thresholds. The continued operation of a mixed-stock commercial fishery downstream of these failing rivers is scientifically unsupportable, ecologically damaging, and inconsistent with national and EU conservation law. Closure is urgently required to protect these stocks from further depletion.

Yours faithfully,



John Murphy

Manager

Salmon Watch Ireland

Phone 0863991074

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