



John Murphy <salmonwatchireland@gmail.com>

Re: Salmon Watch Ireland Policy on Exploitation in Light of Emerging 2026 Scientific Advice

John Murphy <salmonwatchireland@gmail.com>
To: Salmon Watch Ireland <info@salmonwatchireland.ie>

Wed, Oct 29, 2025 at 11:59 AM

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **John Murphy** <salmonwatchireland@gmail.com>
Date: Mon, Oct 27, 2025 at 11:38 AM
Subject: Re: Salmon Watch Ireland Policy on Exploitation in Light of Emerging 2026 Scientific Advice
To: Barry Fox <Barry.Fox@fisheriesireland.ie>, Suzanne Campion <Suzanne.Campion@fisheriesireland.ie>

Dear Barry,

Salmon Watch Ireland (SWIRL) writes to you in advance of the forthcoming *2026 scientific advice on salmon stocks* to restate our policy on exploitation and to highlight our serious concern regarding the continued deterioration of Ireland's wild Atlantic salmon populations.

It is now clear that, despite the removal of drift netting and the introduction of single stock management, there has been no measurable recovery in adult returns. Preliminary information available ahead of the 2026 advice suggests that further rivers may fall below their conservation limits, with additional closures likely.

In this context, SWIRL believes that the current framework for both **commercial and recreational exploitation** must be urgently reviewed and realigned toward a genuine conservation objective. The precautionary principle — long enshrined in Irish and EU law — must guide all management decisions from 2026 onwards.

Accordingly, we wish to set out the following key positions for IFI's consideration:

1. Transition from Exploitation to Recovery-Oriented Management

The overarching national policy must shift from "sustainable harvest" to **population recovery**. All forms of exploitation should be curtailed until stocks demonstrate clear, sustained recovery trends above conservation limits.

2. Phase-Out of Remaining Commercial Net Fisheries

SWIRL continues to call for the **complete closure of all commercial salmon netting**, both public and private, accompanied by fair compensation schemes. The current yields are neither economically viable nor ecologically defensible. The maintenance of any mixed-stock or estuarine netting in the face of continued decline undermines the principles of sustainable management.

3. Recreational Exploitation Reform and Adaptive Catch Policy

The current retention allowance of up to ten salmon per angler per season is incompatible with stock realities. We recommend a **national review of recreational exploitation**, reducing or suspending retention where necessary, and implementing adaptive catch-and-release rules on all systems not exceeding conservation limits.

SWIRL recognises that angling communities play a vital conservation role. Any transition must therefore be accompanied by consultation, support for club-based conservation activity, and the promotion of a strong stewardship ethos.

4. Strengthened Scientific Basis for Exploitation Decisions

SWIRL supports the Single Stock Management system but calls for **greater transparency and robustness in conservation limit methodologies**, particularly for rivers without counters.

Given the downward trajectory, the probability threshold for meeting conservation limits should be increased beyond the current 75% to better reflect the precautionary approach required in 2026 and beyond.

5. Reinforced Enforcement and Tagging Controls

Both commercial and recreational tagging systems require tighter oversight. SWIRL urges IFI to:

- Strengthen verification and reporting procedures;
- Impose meaningful sanctions for breaches;
- Improve data collection on catch-and-release outcomes and post-release survival.

6. Firm Opposition to Any Reintroduction of Mixed-Stock Fisheries

We are aware of intermittent lobbying for renewed mixed-stock drift netting. SWIRL reiterates its categorical opposition to any such reintroduction, which would contravene Ireland's obligations under the EU Habitats Directive and the NASCO guidelines for sustainable salmon management.

A Call for Leadership and Public Clarity

The forthcoming 2026 advice represents a critical juncture for salmon management in Ireland. SWIRL urges IFI to provide clear public communication acknowledging the seriousness of the situation and to recommend to the Government that **all exploitation be further constrained** until there is demonstrable recovery.

SWIRL also encourages IFI to work with stakeholders to develop a new *National Salmon Recovery Strategy* — integrating habitat restoration, climate adaptation, enforcement, and exploitation management within a coherent framework.

We would welcome the opportunity to meet with IFI's senior management and scientific staff to discuss these proposals and to ensure that the response to the 2026 advice is both science-led and conservation-focused.

Thank you for your continued commitment to protecting Ireland's wild Atlantic salmon.

Yours sincerely,

John

John Murphy

Director

Salmon Watch Ireland

<https://salmonwatchireland.ie>

info@salmonwatchireland.ie

Phone 086 3991074

--

John Murphy

Director

Salmon Watch Ireland

<https://salmonwatchireland.ie>

info@salmonwatchireland.ie

Phone 086 3991074