

Newsletter Number 22

17 October 2025

Presentation by Chantel Carr

Biosecurity and Invasive Species



Building a Sustainable Future – Maura Brennan, Nore Vision

“A shared vision for the Nore: community-led stewardship.”



Salmon Watch Ireland – Conference 2025 Newsletter

“Protecting Wild Salmon: Science, Stewardship, and Accountability”

Athlone, October 2025

This year’s Salmon Watch Conference took place at a pivotal moment for Ireland’s wild salmon. Our rivers and coastal waters are under immense pressure — from pollution, aquaculture, invasive species, and a changing climate. Yet the energy in the room in Athlone was one of determination and hope.

The conference brought together scientists, environmental advocates, community leaders, and policy voices.

Each presentation revealed a vital piece of the puzzle — and together they form a clear picture: Ireland’s salmon crisis is not inevitable. With strong governance, scientific integrity, and grassroots stewardship, recovery is still within reach.

PRESENTATIONS IN MARGIN

Biosecurity and Invasive Species – Chantel Carr, National Biodiversity Data Centre

“Prevention is better than cure.”

Chantel Carr called on anglers to take up the front line in protecting our waters. Invasive species like curly waterweed, knotweed, and American mink devastate ecosystems and drain millions from local economies.

At Lough Carra, early action — from signage to mink trapping — has prevented the invasive crises seen elsewhere. Carr stressed that *low-cost biosecurity measures* such as “Check, Clean, Dry” routines, steam-wash stations, and club-level awareness days are the simplest way to stop the spread.

“You are the eyes and boots on the ground.” Every angler has the power to prevent irreversible ecological damage.

Building a Sustainable Future – Maura Brennan, Nore Vision

“A shared vision for the Nore: community-led stewardship.”

The Nore Vision initiative shows what real water stewardship looks like. Born in 2020, it unites farmers, communities, and scientists to tackle agricultural pressures, biodiversity loss, and pollution in the Nore catchment.

Through citizen science, Himalayan Balsam control, and Nature-Based

Tracking Salmon Survival

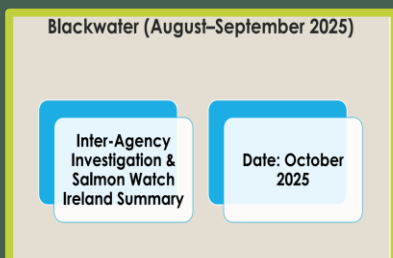
– Dr. Elvira de Eyto,
Marine Institute

“A 70-year record of
warning from
Burrishoole.”



The Munster Blackwater Fish Kill – Inter-Agency Summary & Salmon Watch Response

“A wake-up call for
Ireland’s enforcement
system.”



Solution demonstration farms, the project is improving local water quality while nurturing pride and participation.

Her message was clear: when people reconnect with their river, stewardship follows. This community model deserves replication across Ireland’s catchments.

Tracking Salmon Survival – Dr. Elvira de Eyto, Marine Institute

“A 70-year record of warning from Burrishoole.”

Elvira de Eyto presented seven decades of data showing that despite policy interventions, marine survival has collapsed to just 7–8%. This survival rate is on average 50% below returns prior to 2008. Hatchery salmon fare worse at 3%.

Her research reveals shrinking fish sizes, earlier returns, and rising temperatures of 0.2–0.3°C per decade.

Predation, particularly near estuaries, further reduces survival. De Eyto urged Ireland to use these long-term data to model future outcomes and plan adaptive restoration.

“We are witnessing climate change in real time,” she warned
— the question now is how we respond.

The Munster Blackwater Fish Kill – Inter-Agency Summary & Salmon Watch Response

“A wake-up call for Ireland’s enforcement system.”

In August 2025, over 32,000 fish died in a catastrophic event on the Munster Blackwater. The official investigation found no single pollutant, but evidence pointed to a short-lived toxic discharge.

While the Inter-Agency Group’s findings remained inconclusive, Salmon Watch Ireland condemned the broader failure of environmental governance: weak pollution control, chronic nutrient overload, and slow response times.

SWI called for:

- Real-time monitoring of discharges and pollutants
- Rapid response teams with testing capacity
- Public transparency through online databases

This tragedy, SWI warned, reflects not bad luck but systemic neglect.

Sea Lice and Salmon Mortality – Dr. Paddy Gargan

“The evidence is now clear.”

The impact of sea lice from salmon farms on salmon survival in Ireland – a long-term Review

Dr. Paddy Gargan

Sea Lice and Salmon Mortality – Dr. Paddy Gargan

“The evidence is now clear.”

After decades of dispute, Dr. Gargan’s 2025 study confirmed what anglers and conservationists long suspected: sea lice from salmon farms significantly reduce wild salmon survival.

Across 43 paired-release experiments, untreated salmon suffered up to 19% higher mortality, and the risk rose with lice levels near farms.

Chemical treatments are also losing effectiveness, suggesting resistance. The research establishes sea lice as a mechanistic threat under the EU Habitats Directive, meaning the precautionary principle must apply to all aquaculture licensing.

“If we cannot rule out harm, we cannot license risk,” Gargan said — a defining statement for future policy.

Deenish Island Salmon Farm – Legal and Environmental Case Study

“Regulatory failure on the Kerry coast.”

DEENISH ISLAND SALMON FARMING CASE

LEGAL, ENVIRONMENTAL & POLICY ISSUES



Deenish Island Salmon Farm – Legal and Environmental Case Study

“Regulatory failure on the Kerry coast.”

The Deenish Island case exposes how outdated licences and weak regulatory oversight can seriously harm wild fish populations. Despite operating on an expired licence and repeatedly exceeding authorised production limits — reaching up to 1,800 tonnes of salmon compared with a 500-tonne cap — the farm continues to operate.

These operations have been linked to severe environmental impacts in the area, including the collapse of local sea trout stocks, nutrient pollution, and genetic risks from escaped farmed salmon.

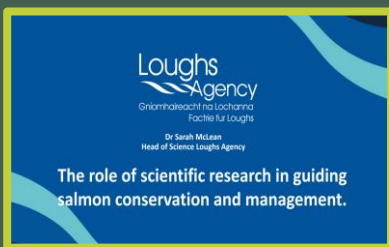
In 2025, the Aquaculture Licences Appeals Board (ALAB) acknowledged major breaches of licence conditions but nevertheless allowed operations to continue, citing “economic impact.”

Salmon Watch Ireland condemned the decision as inconsistent with the precautionary principle and vowed to seek legal advice on the determination. The Deenish Island farm is once again under investigation by the Department for alleged breaches of its licence terms and conditions. It continues to operate under its original, outdated licence and remains in ongoing breach of those conditions.

“For coastal communities like Waterville, this is not just an environmental issue — it’s a fight for their cultural and economic future.”

The Role of Science in Salmon Conservation – Dr. Sarah McLean, Loughs Agency

“Science must cross borders, just like salmon.”



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“Science must cross borders, just like salmon.”

Dr. McLean emphasized that effective conservation demands cross-border cooperation and ecosystem-based management. Her team’s acoustic telemetry work traces migration routes and identifies bottlenecks, helping shape restoration priorities. She warned that management confined by political or catchment boundaries ignores the salmon’s true-life cycle. Data must inform action — and be shared freely among agencies and nations.

“Salmon don’t recognise borders. Our science and management shouldn’t either.”

Aquaculture and European Directives – Emma Armshaw, SWAN

“Ireland’s open-net salmon farming is incompatible with clean-water laws.”

Representing the Sustainable Water Network (SWAN), Emma Armshaw exposed the contradiction between Ireland’s “organic” farmed salmon label and the reality of chemical use, nutrient discharge, and sea lice infestations.

Under the Water Framework and Marine Strategy Framework Directives, Ireland is legally bound to achieve “good ecological status” — a standard open-net pens cannot meet.

Armshaw highlighted pressures that salmon aquaculture places on the marine environment and new aquaculture-focused action points in the 2024 Water Action Plan, including licence transparency and tighter integration with WFD goals, but warned that progress will mean little without enforcement.

Her solution: an ecosystem-based aquaculture strategy and research into alternative approaches to aquaculture, such as closed-containment systems.

“Without these, Ireland risks breaching both EU law and public trust.”

Aquaculture and European Directives – Emma Armshaw, SWAN

“Ireland’s open-net salmon farming is incompatible with clean-water laws.”



Conserving Salmon Stocks – Ken Whelan

“The missing piece lies in the sea.”



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“The missing piece lies in the sea.”

Ken Whelan reminded delegates that while freshwater conservation has improved, the marine phase remains unprotected. Drawing on SAMARCH and SALSEA findings, he outlined the multiple pressures salmon face at sea — estuarine droughts, predation, bycatch, and climate-driven food-web shifts.

Whelan argued for designated migration corridors, improved monitoring of coastal bycatch, and integration of salmon into broader marine biodiversity frameworks.

“Salmon are part of the ocean ecosystem,”

“We must stop managing them as if they only belong to rivers.”

Latest News

EPA Highlights ongoing decline in water quality across all areas.

Water quality has improved in some areas but continues to decline overall

Date released: October 13, 2023

- Just over half (52 per cent) of our surface waters are in satisfactory ecological condition, which is a deterioration from the previous assessment for 2018, when 54 per cent of surface waterbodies met their water quality objectives.
- Excess nutrients from agriculture, urban wastewater and other human activities remains the biggest challenge, followed by changes to physical habitat conditions.
- There is evidence that nutrient levels are reducing in areas where actions are being targeted, which is very welcome. The scale and pace of implementation needs to be increased.
- At the current level of progress, Ireland will fail to meet the EU and national goal of restoring all waters to good or better status by 2027.

14 October 2023: The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has today published our flagship **Water Quality in Ireland Report 2023**, which provides the latest, yearly assessment of the quality of Ireland's rivers, lakes, estuaries, coastal waters, canals and groundwater. This assessment includes multiple water quality parameters that are monitored and assessed to give an integrated picture of the condition of our waters.

Common Threads and Calls to Action

Three clear priorities emerged from this year's conference:

1. **Enforce the Law:** Ireland's environmental oversight is fractured. Regulators must act decisively against pollution, licence breaches, and aquaculture non-compliance.
2. **Adapt to a Changing Climate:** Research shows rising water temperatures and altered marine ecosystems are reshaping salmon survival. Conservation strategies must now plan for climate resilience.
3. **Empower Communities:** From biosecurity volunteers to citizen scientists, public engagement is Ireland's strongest conservation asset. Stewardship grows where people feel ownership of their waters.

The 2025 Salmon Watch Conference underscored a simple truth: saving salmon means saving Ireland's rivers and coasts.

Our wild salmon are more than a species — they are a living thread that connects science, community, and culture.

Salmon Watch Ireland remains committed to pressing for transparency, accountability, and genuine ecosystem protection at every level — from local councils to European courts.

Together, we can ensure that the next generation inherits rivers where salmon still run.

Support Salmon Watch Ireland

Please Donate



The Conference was supported by LAWPRO



Next Steps – How You Can Help

1. Report Pollution or Invasive Species

→ Visit www.invasives.ie or contact Inland Fisheries Ireland via <https://fisheriesireland.ie>

2. Join Salmon Watch Ireland

→ Membership funds independent advocacy and scientific review. Sign up at <https://salmonwatchireland.ie>

3. Support Clean Water Reform

→ Write to your TD or MEP demanding tighter enforcement of the Water Framework Directive and aquaculture licensing reform.

4. Volunteer Locally

→ Join citizen science and invasive species control efforts through the Community Water Development Fund or your local catchment group.

5. Spread the Word

→ Share this newsletter. Host a screening, a club talk, or a riverside clean-up. Public pressure is our most powerful conservation tool.

Together, we can restore Ireland's rivers — and protect the wild salmon that depend on them.

"Commit to Cold, Clean Water – Ensure the Salmon's Future."



SALMON WATCH IRELAND

Dedicated to the restoration of salmon abundance in Ireland"

SAVING THE IRISH SALMON