



NEWSLETTER NUMBER 25 – November 2025

## THE FUTURE OF IRELAND'S ATLANTIC SALMON — A SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

### ATLANTIC SALMON AT A CRITICAL JUNCTURE

Across Ireland, Atlantic salmon stocks have reached **alarmingly low levels**, a situation clearly reflected in Inland Fisheries Ireland's 2026 scientific assessments. Many rivers now fall **below 65% of their Conservation Limit (CL)** resulting in unprecedented numbers of rivers being designated **Catch & Release only or fully closed** under the 2026 Wild Salmon and Sea Trout Tagging Scheme Regulations.

The scientific note accompanying the regulations highlights this stark decline, noting that wild salmon harvested in Ireland have fallen from **36,500 in 2010 to just over 11,500 in 2024**, and national quotas have collapsed from **91,500 in 2011 to roughly 30,000 for 2025**. These reductions are not administrative decisions—they are alarming mathematical reflections of collapsing stock abundance.

### WHY SPAWNING ESCAPEMENT IS EVERYTHING

To rebuild the species, **the vast majority of returning salmon must now reach their spawning beds**. This is not optional. It is the biological foundation of salmon survival.

The Conservation Limit (CL), defined by ICES and NASCO as the level that supports *maximum sustainable yield*, represents the spawning population needed for healthy reproduction. This year, very few rivers exceed that threshold. Many are far below it.

Where a river meets less than 65% of its CL — as with the Boyne at only **10%** or the Srahmore at **45%**, angling must be restricted or entirely closed, because causing mortality to even a small number of fish risks eliminating that stock's future.

Put simply:

**If salmon do not spawn, salmon do not return. Every fish counts.**

## A SHARED CRISIS ACROSS THE NORTH ATLANTIC

Ireland is not alone.

Recent analysis from NASCO and associated marine science bodies confirms that the **collapse is international**, spanning:

- **Ireland** – widespread closures and sharply reduced quotas
- **United Kingdom (England, Wales, Scotland)** – multi-decadal decline in returning adults
- **Southern and western Norway** – major reductions attributed to warming seas, aquaculture interactions, and marine mortality
- **Spain**

The 2026 information note acknowledges many of the same pressures: **marine mortality, climate shifts, disease, habitat degradation, salmon farming, predation and reduced water quality.**

These factors operate across political boundaries, making salmon decline a **shared North Atlantic emergency**, not a uniquely Irish one.

## NO BLAME — BUT A CALL FOR REFLECTION AND STEWARDSHIP

While exploitation contributes to pressure on stocks, **the newsletter must be clear:** Stakeholders engaged in angling, commercial fishing, tourism, and river management are **not being blamed** for the decline.

For generations, these communities have been **custodians** of rivers, local economies, and salmon heritage engaging in many hours of voluntary protection of the resource. Many have already made major sacrifices during the years of restrictions, closures, and quota reductions. The 2026 rules reflect this shared stewardship, with:

- **Commercial fisheries being removed from many systems**
- **Anglers facing reduced bag limits—from 10 fish to 3 per year**
- **Dozens of rivers becoming Catch & Release only**
- **Historic rivers closing entirely** due to low fry counts or CL deficits

These choices are not judgments on communities, but essential steps to allow salmon a chance to survive.

However, at this pivotal moment, all stakeholders — anglers, commercial crews, river managers, policymakers, and local communities — are called to **morally reflect** on a simple truth:

**Only by allowing the majority of returning salmon to spawn can the species survive or to offer hope of recovery.**

Every unnecessary removal of a fish is a lost opportunity for renewal.

## WORKING TOGETHER FOR RECOVERY

Rebuilding Atlantic salmon will require:

- **Collective sacrifice**, not selective blame
- **International coordination** across the North Atlantic
- **Improved habitat, water quality, and marine survival**
- **Recognition that spawning escapement is the cornerstone of recovery**

The 2026 tagging regulations are a step toward that goal, guided by science and the precautionary principle. But regulation alone will not save salmon. Only a united cultural shift — rooted in stewardship, restraint, and shared responsibility — can ensure future runs thrive again.

## A FINAL MESSAGE OF HOPE

Salmon are resilient.

When given the chance to spawn and rebuild, populations can recover impressively. But time is running out. Ireland, the UK, and Norway now stand at a critical juncture.

If we allow more salmon to reach their spawning grounds, protect their habitats, and limit pressures in the short term, **the species can rebound**. If we fail to act, the opposite outcome is equally possible.

**THE CHOICE — AND OPPORTUNITY — IS OURS.**