

Salmon Watch Ireland Newsletter

Issue Number 30 – 06 February 2026



Salmon Watch Ireland response to updated draft tagging regulations

Salmon Watch Ireland acknowledges that the updated draft Wild Salmon and Sea Trout Tagging Scheme Regulations 2026 include measures that continue to provide important protection for spring salmon, particularly through the retention of strict controls outside the main summer harvest period. The organisation recognises the importance of safeguarding early running fish, which remain under pressure in many river systems.

However, Salmon Watch Ireland is concerned by several elements of the revised draft, particularly where changes represent a reduction in precaution compared with the previous draft regulations.

Increased angling allocation

While the continued protection of spring salmon is welcome, Salmon Watch Ireland is concerned that the allocation of tags to anglers has been significantly increased from what was indicated by original draft. The increase from three to seven blue tags for annual and 21-day licence holders represents a substantial rise in potential harvest pressure during the summer months. The organisation believes this increase is not justified given the ongoing vulnerability of many salmon stocks.

Reopening of the Castlemaine commercial fishery

Salmon Watch Ireland is particularly concerned by the proposal to reopen the commercial fishery in Castlemaine Harbour, which was closed in the previous draft regulations.

The organisation will be raising a strong objection to this proposal. While a combined surplus has been identified across the contributing rivers, the River Maine has only a small surplus, and there is a significant risk that reopening the estuary fishery could lead to over-exploitation of weaker component stocks, including the Maine. This approach undermines the precautionary management required for mixed-stock fisheries. The potential increase in commercial catch could be upwards of 500 salmon.

The commercial exploitation on the River Lee will also increase in consideration of increased total allowable catch proposed.

We are very supportive of the decision to safeguard the Munster Blackwater by the decision to not allow harvest for 2026.

Other commercial fisheries appear to be closed but we will monitor the situation going forward.

Reduction in probability factor

Salmon Watch Ireland is also concerned by the reduction in the probability factor used in stock assessments from 85% to 75%, which has resulted in more fish being deemed available for harvesting across many river systems.

In the organisation's view, lowering the probability threshold is not in the best interests of salmon conservation, particularly in the context of climate change, habitat pressures, and ongoing uncertainty around stock recovery. This change reduces the margin of safety that should underpin management decisions.

A call for restraint from anglers

Salmon Watch Ireland recognises the deep commitment many anglers have to the protection of wild salmon and sea trout. In light of the ongoing consultation process and the uncertainty surrounding the final form of the regulations, the organisation asks anglers to please show restraint during the coming season.

In particular, Salmon Watch Ireland is requesting that anglers voluntarily and immediately cease the harvesting of salmon (Although legal until new regulations are introduced), and fish on a catch-and-release basis only, until a determination is published on the new regulations. This voluntary action would provide an additional layer of protection for vulnerable stocks at a critical time and

demonstrate the angling community's commitment to conservation-led management.

Early running salmon are of particular conservation importance. There is evidence to suggest that run timing has a genetic component, meaning that fish which return early in the season may produce offspring that also return early. These early running fish are especially valuable to the long-term diversity and resilience of salmon stocks, helping to spread spawning and migration over a wider period and reducing risk to the population as a whole. For this reason, the harvesting of early-running salmon is strongly discouraged, and Salmon Watch Ireland urges anglers to allow these fish to pass upstream and spawn unimpeded.

Salmon stocks are at a critical point

Salmon stocks are in crisis, and there is an urgent need to ensure that the vast majority of returning fish are allowed to spawn. Salmon Watch Ireland emphasises that larger salmon, in particular, are of exceptional importance to stock recovery and must be highly valued and protected. These fish contribute disproportionately to reproduction and resilience and are vital to the long-term future of our rivers.

If meaningful improvement in stock status is achieved in the coming years, it may be possible to consider increased exploitation at that time. However, this is not the moment to seek to catch a personal limit. The priority now must be conservation, restraint, and ensuring that as many fish as possible reach the spawning beds to support recovery.

Consultation and next steps

Salmon Watch Ireland will be making a formal submission as part of the public consultation process on the draft regulations.

For information, a table outlining the key changes between the previous and updated draft regulations is linked to this newsletter. This table is intended to assist supporters and stakeholders in understanding the scope and scale of the proposed changes. Please click on picture:

Fishery District	River / Water	Draft Status & TAC Original Proposal for 2026	2026 Draft Status & TAC / At Public Consultation	Change Type
Dublin	Dargle	Closed	Closed	No Change
Dublin	Upper Liffey	Closed	Closed	No Change
Dublin	Lower Liffey (downstream of Leixlip Dam)	Closed	Closed	No Change
Dublin	Vartry	Closed	Closed	No Change
Wexford	Slaney	Closed to 31 May (2SW); C&R from 1 June (1SW)	Closed to 31 May (2SW); C&R from 1 June (1SW)	No Change
Wexford	Avoca	Closed	Closed	No Change
Wexford	Owenavorrhagh	Closed	Closed	No Change
Waterford	Barrow & Pollmounty	Catch & Release	Catch & Release	No Change
Waterford	Nore	Catch & Release	Catch & Release	No Change
Waterford	Suir incl. Clodiagh, Lingaun & Waterford Blackwater	Catch & Release	Catch & Release	No Change
Waterford	Colligan	Closed	Closed	No Change
Waterford	Corrock	Closed	Closed	No Change
Waterford	Owenduff	Closed	Closed	No Change
Waterford	Mahon	Closed	Closed	No Change
Waterford	Tay	Closed	Closed	No Change
Lismore	Blackwater (Munster)	Catch & Release	Catch & Release (unmanageable surplus)	Other Change
Lismore	Bride	Catch & Release	Catch & Release	No Change
Lismore	Lickey	Closed	Closed	No Change
Lismore	Tourig	Closed	Closed	No Change
Lismore	Womanagh	Closed	Closed	No Change
Cork	Owenacurra	Catch & Release	Catch & Release	No Change
Cork	Lower Lee	Open – 699	Open – 945	TAC Increased

Salmon Watch Ireland’s full submission will be published at a later date, and the organisation will continue to engage constructively with the consultation process in the interest of strong, precautionary salmon management.

Calling All Anglers!!

Help Stop The Spread of Invasive Species

Logos at the top include: NIEA Northern Ireland Environment Agency, NPWS An tOideacht Náisiúnta agus Fíadhbhíra National Parks and Wildlife Service, Invasives.ie Invasive Alien Species in Ireland, An tSeirbhís Páircéanna Náisiúnta agus Fíadhbhíra National Parks and Wildlife Service, Funded by An Chomhairle Oidhreachta The Heritage Council, and National Biodiversity Data Centre.