# Salmon Watch Ireland

**Newsletter No. 42 – 10 July 2026**

**Sneem River County Kerry – Relatively un-spoilt but heating up fast**

## Warm Weather and Wild Salmon: Why Water Temperature Matters

As another warm summer unfolds, Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) has issued a scientific advice note explaining why periods of high-water temperature pose a serious threat to Atlantic salmon and sea trout, and why temporary angling restrictions may sometimes be necessary. The advice is based on an extensive review of current international scientific research and reflects growing concern that climate change is increasing the frequency and severity of warm-water events in Irish rivers.

Wild Atlantic salmon and sea trout are cold-water species. They have evolved to thrive in cool, well-oxygenated rivers, and even relatively small increases in water temperature can place them under significant physiological stress. During prolonged periods of hot, dry weather, river flows decline while water temperatures rise. At the same time, warmer water

holds less dissolved oxygen, creating what scientists describe as "oxythermal stress" – the combined effects of high temperatures and reduced oxygen availability.

These conditions are particularly challenging for fish that are already undertaking demanding migrations or preparing to spawn. If a salmon is caught and released during such periods, the additional stress of being hooked, played and handled can overwhelm its ability to recover, even if it swims away strongly. Scientific studies consistently show that catch-and-release mortality increases significantly when water temperatures exceed approximately 20°C.

## A Practical Temperature Protocol

To help protect vulnerable fish stocks, IFI has adopted a simple traffic-light system for fisheries managers:

Green (<18°C): Angling can continue under normal conditions.

Amber (18–20°C): Anglers should exercise extreme care, minimise fish handling, avoid exposing fish to air, and be aware that closures may become necessary if temperatures continue to rise.

Red (>20°C): Recreational angling should cease until temperatures fall to safer levels.

Importantly, the advice recommends an even more precautionary approach for rivers where salmon stocks are already below their conservation limits. On these rivers, which are generally managed on a catch-and-release basis, fisheries managers should consider closure once temperatures repeatedly reach 18°C, recognising that vulnerable populations have less capacity to withstand additional stress.

## More Than Just Temperature

The guidance also highlights that warm water rarely occurs in isolation. High temperatures are usually accompanied by low river flows, reduced habitat availability and lower oxygen concentrations. These combined pressures leave fish with little margin for coping with additional stress. The longer a heatwave persists, the more severe these effects become.

Interestingly, IFI notes that cool early mornings do not necessarily mean conditions are safe. Although temperatures may briefly fall overnight, dissolved oxygen levels are often at their lowest during the early hours of the morning. As a result, fish may still be experiencing considerable physiological stress despite cooler water.

## What This Means for Anglers

Responsible anglers have always played an important role in salmon conservation, and periods of exceptionally warm weather require additional care. If fishing is permitted during warmer conditions:

Land fish as quickly as possible.

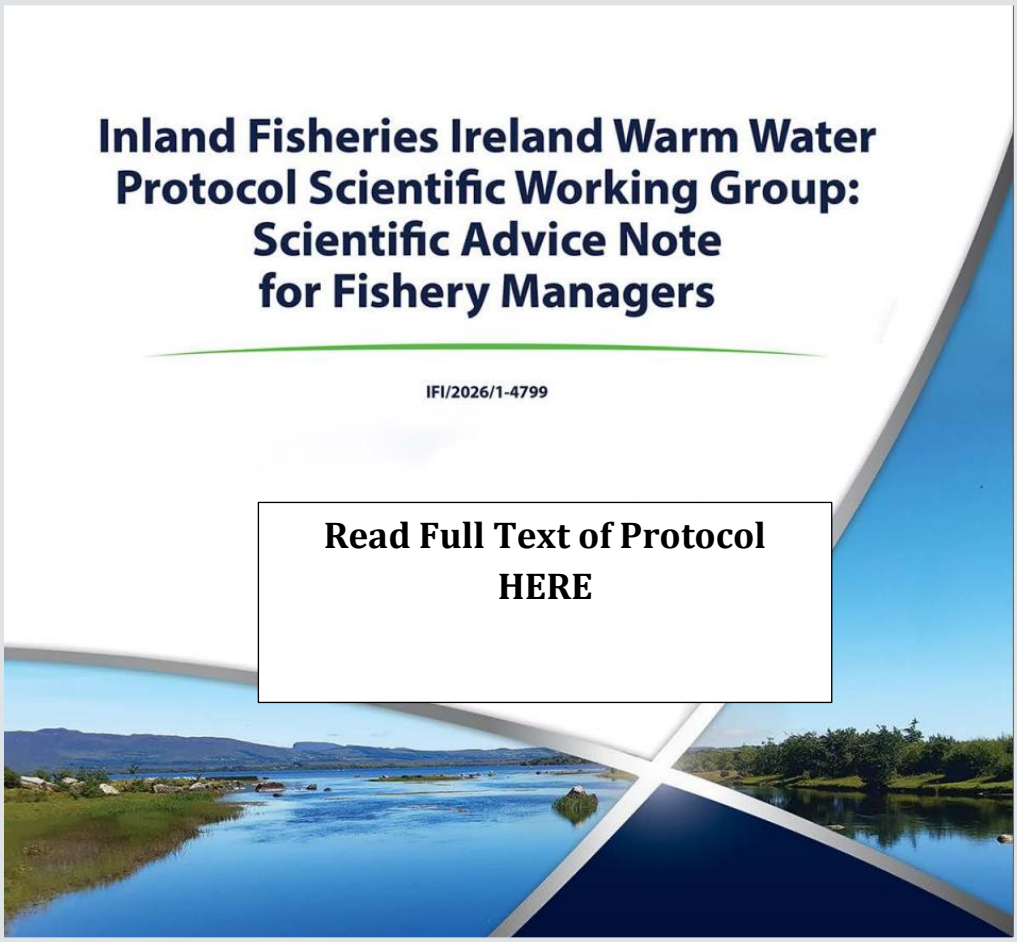
Keep fish in the water at all times.

Avoid unnecessary handling and never place fish on dry surfaces.

Do not expose fish to air for photographs.

Release fish immediately once the hook has been removed.

If fisheries are temporarily closed because of high water temperatures, these measures are not intended to prevent angling unnecessarily. Rather, they are designed to protect fish at times when their chances of surviving capture and release are significantly reduced.




## A Growing Challenge

Climate change is expected to make warm-water events more frequent across Ireland in the coming decades. This means that protecting rivers through improved riparian planting, restoring natural flows, safeguarding water quality and reducing other human pressures will become increasingly important if wild Atlantic salmon and sea trout are to survive and recover.

Salmon Watch Ireland welcomes the publication of this scientific guidance. It recognises the reality that our iconic salmonid species are facing increasing thermal stress and reinforces the need for precautionary management during periods of high water temperature. Conserving wild salmon requires action across many fronts, and adapting to a warming climate must now become an integral part of that effort.

Think before you catch a salmon. During warm weather, choosing not to fish may be one of the most important conservation decisions an angler can make.

## Salmon Watch Ireland Presents Evidence to Joint Oireachtas Committee on Farmed Salmon Mortalities

Recently, Salmon Watch Ireland made a detailed submission to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Fisheries and Maritime Affairs and the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Climate, Environment and Energy highlighting what we believe is one of the most pressing issues facing Irish aquaculture today – the exceptionally high mortality rates occurring within the open-net salmon farming industry.

Our submission brings together evidence from Aquaculture Stewardship Council (ASC) audit reports, aquaculture licence applications and official mortality data released by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine. The evidence demonstrates that mortality rates approaching or exceeding 40%, 50% and, in one documented production cycle, more than 80% have occurred at Irish salmon farms. These losses are taking place against a backdrop of warming seas, harmful algal blooms, jellyfish blooms, disease outbreaks and increasing sea lice pressure, all of which are expected to become more significant as climate change progresses.

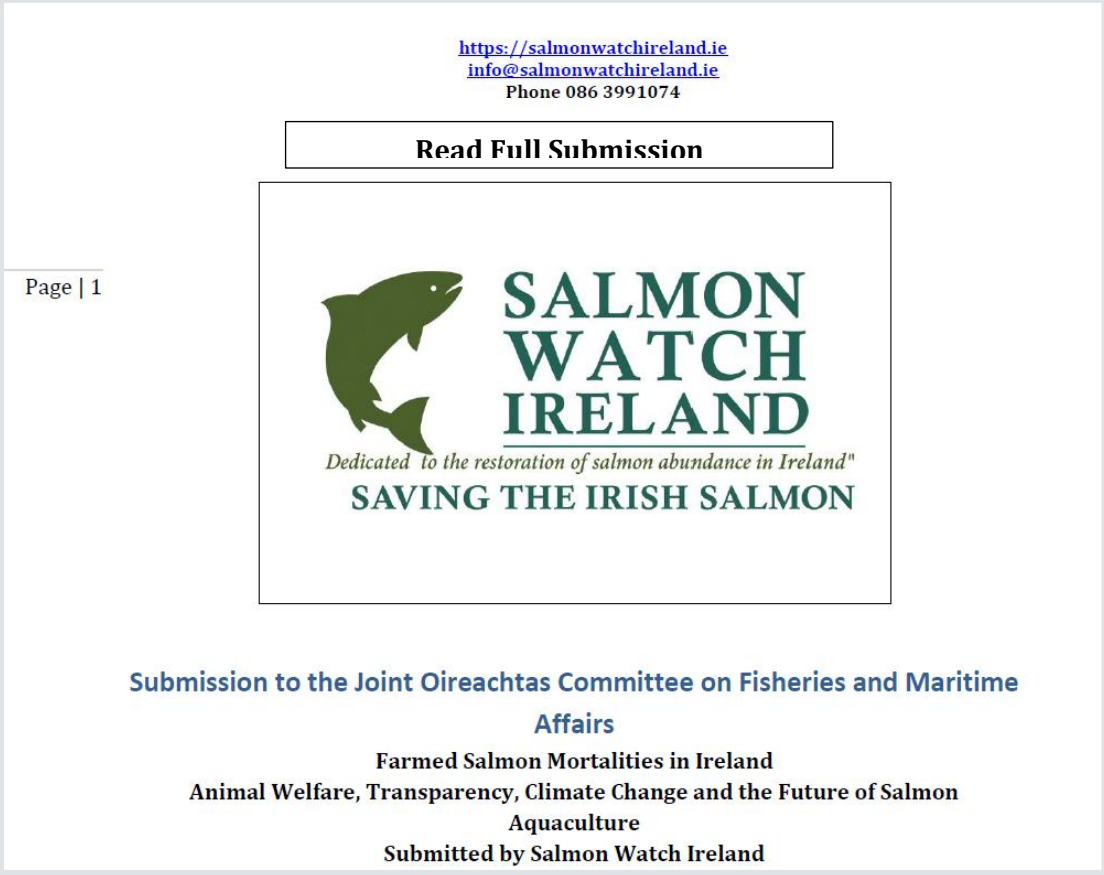
The submission argues that mortality on this scale should be recognised not only as a serious animal welfare issue but also as an indicator that intensive open-net pen production is becoming increasingly vulnerable to environmental change. It also highlights the wider implications for wild Atlantic salmon and sea trout, noting that open-net farms can act as reservoirs for parasites and disease adjacent to many salmonid rivers, a large number which are designated as Special Areas of Conservation for Atlantic salmon.

A further concern raised is the reduction in transparency surrounding the industry. Historically, independently audited ASC reports and production data contained valuable information on survival, mortality, disease and fish welfare. With the withdrawal of Irish MOWI farms from ASC certification and the removal or redaction of some production data from publicly available sources, opportunities for independent scrutiny have been significantly reduced.

Salmon Watch Ireland has called on the Committee to recognise recurring high mortality rates as a matter of national public policy, commission an independent review of mortality

events, improve transparency through the publication of farm-specific mortality and disease data, strengthen climate resilience assessments, and begin developing a national strategy to support a transition towards land-based closed containment systems, which offer far greater control over fish health, biosecurity, water quality and environmental impacts.

Our appearance before the Joint Oireachtas Committee provided an important opportunity to place these issues firmly on the national agenda. We look forward to continuing to engage constructively with policymakers to ensure that fish welfare, environmental protection and the long-term conservation of Ireland's wild Atlantic salmon remain central to future aquaculture policy.



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**Read Full Submission**

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SALMON WATCH IRELAND

*Dedicated to the restoration of salmon abundance in Ireland"*

SAVING THE IRISH SALMON

**Submission to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Fisheries and Maritime Affairs**

**Farmed Salmon Mortalities in Ireland**
**Animal Welfare, Transparency, Climate Change and the Future of Salmon Aquaculture**
**Submitted by Salmon Watch Ireland**

## Information Commissioner Upholds Salmon Watch Ireland Appeal on Aquaculture Transparency

Recently, Salmon Watch Ireland secured an important decision from the Office of the Information Commissioner (OIC) concerning transparency in Ireland's aquaculture licensing process. The case arose after the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine refused access to historical mortality, stocking and harvest data associated with five salmon farm licence renewal applications, claiming the information was commercially sensitive.

The Information Commissioner rejected the Department's arguments, finding that it had not justified withholding the information under the commercial sensitivity provisions of the Freedom of Information Act. The decision directed that the mortality, stocking and harvest data be released, recognising that this information is relevant to public scrutiny of aquaculture operations and licence renewals.

During the review, it also emerged that the Department had removed historical operational data—including mortality, survival, harvest and feed conversion information—from newer aquaculture licence application forms because it was no longer being assessed as part of the licensing process.

Following the decision, Salmon Watch Ireland wrote to the Minister and the Department seeking an explanation for the removal of these sections from application forms, requesting the restoration and publication of the omitted information, and calling for affected licence applications to be republished with full operational data and reopened for public consultation. We believe that meaningful public participation in environmental decision-making requires access to historical operational information that allows the environmental performance of salmon farms to be properly assessed and scrutinised.