

Atlantic Salmon Catches and Returns Decline Across Europe

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High water quality and relatively undisturbed habitat

High juvenile abundance – low adult returns

New figures show sharp declines in reported Atlantic salmon catches and returns across Europe, from Norway and Iceland to Ireland, Britain, France and northern Spain.

Introduction

The latest available statistics from across Europe present a deeply concerning picture for the future of wild Atlantic salmon.

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Between 2020 and 2025, reported recreational salmon catches declined by 51% in Ireland, 46% in Norway, 38% in Scotland and 65% in England and Wales.

Iceland also experienced a 24% reduction in total recreational salmon catches, while reported salmon catches in Asturias, northern Spain, fell by 85%. In France, adult salmon counted at the Vichy monitoring station on the Loire–Allier system declined by 78%, with additional evidence of poor returns from Brittany and southwestern France.

Although these statistics represent different measures of salmon catches and returns, the geographical extent of the reductions is striking.

For Salmon Watch Ireland, the figures reinforce the urgent need for stronger salmon conservation and improved international cooperation to understand and address the pressures affecting Atlantic salmon populations.

Atlantic Salmon Catches and Returns: 2020–2025

Country or region	2020	2025	Reduction
Ireland — rod catch	21,650	10,695	50.6%
Scotland — rod catch	45,366	28,020	38.2%
Norway — river catch	123,167	67,064	45.5%
Iceland — rod catch	45,124	34,186	24.2%
England and Wales — rod catch	11,566	4,053	65.0%
France — Vichy adult count	356	78	78.1%
Spain — Asturias Catches	856	130	85.0%

Note: These statistics are not directly equivalent. Ireland, Scotland, England and Wales, Norway and Iceland report recreational catches, including released fish. Iceland's figures include salmon from ocean-ranching programmes. France records adult salmon passing a monitoring station, while Asturias records harvested salmon. Fishing effort, restrictions and environmental conditions can influence reported catches.

Ireland: Recreational Salmon Catches Fall by 51%

The latest statistics published by Inland Fisheries Ireland demonstrate a substantial deterioration in reported salmon catches.

Total national salmon catches, including commercial harvest and recreational catches, declined from 27,829 salmon in 2020 to 14,672 in 2025, a reduction of 47.3%.

Recreational catches declined even more sharply, falling from 21,650 salmon in 2020 to just 10,695 in 2025, a reduction of 50.6%.

Year	Total catch	Recreational catch	Commercial catch
2020	27,829	21,650	6,179
2021	31,148	24,668	6,480
2022	26,715	22,661	4,054
2023	21,045	17,009	4,036
2024	20,822	16,457	4,365
2025	14,672	10,695	3,977

Source: Inland Fisheries Ireland, Wild Salmon and Sea Trout Statistics Reports.

The deterioration was particularly severe during 2025, when recreational catches declined by 35% compared with 2024.

Spring salmon catches also experienced a dramatic reduction, falling from 2,166 in 2024 to just 1,162 in 2025, a decline of 46.4%.

Of the spring salmon recorded in 2025, 516 were harvested and 646 released.

These figures raise serious concerns about the future of Ireland's spring-running salmon populations.

The 2025 statistics also show that approximately 60% of salmon caught by Irish anglers were released.

Scotland: Lowest Salmon Rod Catch Since Records Began

Scotland has experienced a similarly concerning deterioration.

Official Scottish Government statistics show that recreational salmon catches declined from 45,366 in 2020 to 28,020 in 2025, a reduction of 38.2%.

The 2025 catch was the lowest recorded since Scottish salmon rod catch records began in 1952.

The decline was particularly severe between 2024 and 2025, when reported catches fell from 47,618 to 28,020 salmon, a reduction of 41.2%.

Spring salmon catches also declined, falling from 2,625 in 2024 to 1,629 in 2025, a reduction of 37.9%.

Approximately 98% of salmon caught by Scottish anglers in 2025 were released.

Despite this exceptionally high release rate, reported salmon catches remain historically low. This highlights the importance of addressing wider pressures affecting salmon survival alongside restrictions on recreational harvesting.

Norway: Salmon River Catches Decline by 46%

Norway, home to some of Europe's most important wild Atlantic salmon populations, has also experienced a substantial reduction in reported salmon catches.

Statistics Norway's published river catch figures indicate a decline from 123,167 salmon in 2020 to 67,064 in 2025, a reduction of 45.5%.

Year	Total river salmon catch
2020	123,167
2021	78,222
2022	97,678
2023	70,620
2024	44,888
2025	67,064

Source: Statistics Norway. Figures include salmon caught and released. The 2025 figures are preliminary.

Norway experienced an exceptionally poor fishing season in 2024, when only 44,888 salmon were recorded caught in rivers.

Although catches improved substantially in 2025, they remained approximately 46% below their 2020 level.

Norway's emergency river closures during 2024 also influenced reported recreational catches.

Nevertheless, the decline in Norwegian river catches adds another important dimension to the geographical pattern evident across Europe.

Iceland: Salmon Rod Catches Decline by 24%

Iceland has also recorded a substantial reduction in Atlantic salmon catches.

Statistics published by the Icelandic Marine and Freshwater Research Institute show that recreational salmon catches declined from 45,124 salmon in 2020 to 34,186 in 2025, a reduction of 24.2%.

The proportion of salmon caught and released increased from approximately 49.5% in 2020 to 65.8% in 2025.

Iceland's figures include catches from rivers supported by ocean-ranching programmes, which accounted for approximately 27% of the reported recreational salmon catch in 2025.

Consequently, the national figures do not exclusively represent catches of naturally produced wild salmon.

Iceland's results also demonstrate that salmon catches can fluctuate substantially between individual years and river systems.

Nevertheless, the reduction in total reported salmon catches adds to the wider geographical pattern evident across Europe.

Iceland: Atlantic Salmon Rod Catches, 2020–2025

Year	Total salmon caught	Annual change
2020	45,124	+ 54.4%
2021	36,461	–19.2%
2022	43,184	+18.4%
2023	32,726	–24.2%
2024	43,517	+33.0%
2025	34,186	–21.4%
2020–2025		–24.2%

Source: Icelandic Marine and Freshwater Research Institute (MFRI), annual salmon catch statistics.

Note: Figures include retained and released salmon, including fish from ocean-ranching rivers. They do not represent wild-origin salmon exclusively. The very low catch in 2019 led to a 54% increase in 2020.

England and Wales: A 65% Reduction in Salmon Catches

The deterioration in England and Wales has been particularly pronounced.

Official Environment Agency statistics show that combined recreational salmon catches declined from 11,566 in 2020 to just 4,053 in 2025, a reduction of 65%.

In England, reported catches fell from 5,198 in 2024 to 3,599 in 2025, a reduction of 30.8%.

In Wales, catches declined from 812 to just 454 over the same period, a reduction of 44.1%.

Combined catches across England and Wales declined from 6,010 in 2024 to 4,053 in 2025, a reduction of 32.6%, using the latest published Environment Agency figures.

Approximately 98% of salmon caught by anglers in England and Wales during 2025 were released.

Despite very high catch-and-release rates, reported salmon catches remain exceptionally low, indicating that restricting recreational harvest alone is insufficient to secure recovery.

Fishing effort has also declined, which must be considered when interpreting the statistics.

France: Salmon Counters Reveal Widespread Decline

Evidence from salmon monitoring stations across France reinforces concerns about the deterioration of Atlantic salmon populations.

On the Loire–Allier system, adult salmon recorded at the Vichy counting station declined from 356 in 2020 to just 78 in 2025, a reduction of 78.1% over five years.

Year	Adult salmon counted at Vichy
2020	356
2021	264
2022	246
2023	96
2024	62
2025	78

Source: LOGRAMI, Loire–Allier salmon monitoring.

In Brittany, monitoring on the Elorn, Aulne and Scorff rivers also indicates substantial reductions in adult salmon returns between 2020 and 2025, although the precise combined percentage decline requires further verification because of differences between published station totals and the regional summary.

In southwestern France, monitoring in the Adour–Gave basin recorded particularly poor returns between 2024 and 2025 alone.

Salmon counts fell from 520 to 275 on the Gave d'Oloron, a reduction of 47.1%; from 201 to 100 on the Saison, a reduction of 50.2%; and from 266 to 203 on the Gave de Pau, a reduction of 23.7%.

These southwestern French declines represent changes over just one year, rather than the five-year comparison used for the Loire–Allier and Brittany.

The French results are particularly important because fish counters provide evidence of adult salmon migration independently of recreational fishing catches.

Although monitoring conditions can influence individual results, the reductions across geographically separate French river systems provide further evidence of the serious difficulties facing Atlantic salmon throughout western Europe.

Spain: Reported Salmon Catches in Asturias Decline by 85%

Northern Spain has also experienced a dramatic reduction in reported salmon harvests.

In Asturias, one of Spain's most important remaining Atlantic salmon regions, reported catches declined from 856 in 2020 to just 130 in 2025.

This represents a reduction of 85%.

Asturias, Spain — Reported Atlantic Salmon Catches, 2020–2025

Year	Reported salmon catches	Annual change
2020	856	—
2021	526	–38.6%
2022	426	–19.0%
2023	377	–11.5%
2024*	359	–4.8%
2025	130	–63.8%
Overall change, 2020–2025		–84.8%

The association notes that the 2024 total was not officially validated. Figures represent reported catches, not necessarily salmon harvested or total adult returns.

The reduction between 2024 and 2025 alone was approximately 64%.

These statistics represent reported salmon catches, not necessarily all harvested fish. Changes in fishing quotas, regulations and angling effort therefore influence the figures.

Nevertheless, the dramatic reduction in recorded catches is consistent with the serious difficulties facing Atlantic salmon populations at the southern end of their European range.

Northern Ireland: Continuing Conservation Concerns

Northern Ireland has also experienced serious concerns regarding Atlantic salmon populations.

Monitoring in the Foyle catchment has highlighted poor salmon returns and resulted in additional conservation measures.

The Loughs Agency has introduced restrictions in response to concerns about the condition of salmon stocks within its jurisdiction.

A directly comparable recreational catch series for 2020–2025 has not been established for this newsletter, and Northern Ireland is therefore excluded from the numerical comparison.

What Do These Statistics Tell Us?

The figures demonstrate substantial reductions in reported salmon catches and monitored returns across a large part of the European range of Atlantic salmon.

However, catch statistics are not identical to estimates of salmon abundance.

Fishing effort, river flows, weather conditions, seasonal restrictions, catch limits, angler participation and changes in fishing methods can all influence the number of salmon reported caught.

For this reason, a 50% reduction in catches cannot automatically be interpreted as a 50% reduction in the number of salmon returning to rivers.

The Norwegian figures illustrate how changes in fishing restrictions can influence catch totals, while Iceland demonstrates considerable variation between years.

Nevertheless, the geographical extent of the reductions warrants serious attention.

The deterioration is evident across countries with different salmon management systems, different levels of recreational exploitation and different approaches to conservation.

In Scotland and England and Wales, where approximately 98% of salmon caught by anglers are released, reported catches have fallen substantially.

These figures do not establish that catch-and-release policies are ineffective. Rather, they demonstrate that restrictions on recreational harvesting must form part of a wider conservation strategy addressing the multiple pressures affecting salmon populations.

France's fish-counter results provide an additional indication that the concerns extend beyond recreational catch statistics.

Collectively, these findings raise important questions about the pressures affecting Atlantic salmon during their freshwater and marine life stages.

A European-Wide Decline: Is There a Geographical Pattern?

The decline in Atlantic salmon catches and returns across Europe points to a range of common pressures affecting populations throughout their distribution. These include reduced marine survival, changing ocean temperatures and food availability, deteriorating freshwater habitats, pollution, barriers to migration, predation, aquaculture impacts and continued exploitation. While the relative importance of these factors differs between countries and river systems, their cumulative effects are a serious concern. One particularly striking observation is the apparent geographical pattern, with some of the most severe reductions occurring towards the southern end of the Atlantic salmon's European range. Between 2020 and 2025, reported catches declined by 24% in Iceland, 46% in Norway, 38% in Scotland, 51% in Ireland and 65% in England and Wales. Further south, adult salmon counts at Vichy in France declined by 78%, while reported salmon catches in Asturias, Spain, fell by 85%. Although these figures represent different measures of salmon abundance and exploitation, and cannot establish a definitive north–south gradient, they raise an important scientific question: are Atlantic salmon populations at lower latitudes becoming increasingly vulnerable to climate change? Salmon at the southern edge of their European distribution are exposed to generally warmer freshwater conditions, increasing risks of drought, reduced river flows and thermal stress. At sea, changing temperatures, ocean productivity and prey distribution may further affect survival. As a cold-water species, Atlantic salmon may be particularly vulnerable where environmental conditions are approaching their physiological limits. This apparent geographical signal warrants further investigation using comparable measures of adult returns, smolt production and marine survival. It also reinforces the importance of reducing the pressures that can be controlled locally, while strengthening international research into the changing conditions experienced by salmon in the North Atlantic.

The Importance of Marine Survival

Atlantic salmon originating from Ireland, Britain, Norway, Iceland, France and Spain migrate into the North Atlantic, where they encounter changing ocean conditions.

Their survival at sea is influenced by a complex interaction of factors, potentially including food availability, ocean temperatures, changing prey distributions, predation and interactions with marine fisheries.

The extent to which individual factors contribute to declining salmon returns remains an important scientific question.

The widespread geographical pattern of reduced catches strengthens the case for continued international research into marine survival.

However, the catch statistics presented here cannot, on their own, identify the causes of the reductions.

A coordinated approach through the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organization (NASCO) and the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) is essential.

Salmon Watch Ireland: Conservation Must Remain the Priority

Salmon Watch Ireland believes that the scale of the deterioration recorded across Europe demands a stronger precautionary approach to Atlantic salmon management.

The latest statistics provide no justification for relaxing conservation protections.

Our priorities remain:

- **Ending commercial salmon netting and reducing the exploitation of vulnerable wild salmon stocks.**
- **Strengthening protection for spring-running and larger multi-sea-winter salmon.**
- **Maintaining precautionary recreational harvest limits until substantial and sustained stock recovery is scientifically demonstrated.**
- **Improving river habitat, water quality and fish passage to maximise freshwater production.**
- **Addressing the impacts of open-net salmon farming on wild salmon and sea trout.**
- **Strengthening international research into marine survival, including potential interactions with pelagic fisheries and incidental salmon bycatch.**
- **Improving the consistency and transparency of salmon catch, fishing-effort and adult-return statistics across countries.**

It is particularly important that temporary improvements in individual river catches or national statistics are not interpreted as evidence of sustained recovery.

Salmon populations must demonstrate meaningful improvement over a number of years before conservation restrictions are relaxed.

Conclusion: A European-Wide Warning

The latest available statistics reveal a striking geographical pattern.

Since 2020, recreational salmon catches have declined by approximately 51% in Ireland, 46% in Norway, 38% in Scotland, 65% in England and Wales and 24% in Iceland.

In France, adult salmon counts at Vichy declined by 78% between 2020 and 2025, with monitoring in Brittany and southwestern France providing further evidence of serious deterioration. The southwestern French stations recorded reductions of 24–50% between 2024 and 2025 alone.

In Asturias, northern Spain, reported salmon catches fell by 85% between 2020 and 2025.

Although these figures are derived from different monitoring and reporting systems, they collectively demonstrate the serious challenges facing Atlantic salmon across much of their European range.

The deterioration is not confined to individual rivers or countries. It extends across a substantial part of the European distribution of Atlantic salmon.

For Salmon Watch Ireland, the message is clear.

We must protect the salmon that continue to return, maximise the production of healthy wild smolts from our rivers and intensify international efforts to understand the factors affecting survival at sea.

The future of wild Atlantic salmon cannot depend on waiting for another poor season before action is taken.

Conservation must remain the priority until there is clear evidence of substantial and sustained recovery.

Post Note:

Declining Marine Survival Reflected in Salmon Returns

Research undertaken by Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) on the River Erriff provides further evidence of the pressures facing Ireland's wild Atlantic salmon. PIT-tagging studies recorded average marine survival of 3.5% for smolts migrating in 2016, 2018 and 2019, compared with just 1.8% for the 2020–2023 cohorts, a reduction of almost 48%. The latest available estimate for the 2023 cohort was particularly concerning, with marine survival falling to 1.3%. This deterioration is accompanied by a substantial decline in wild adult salmon returning to the Erriff, from a five-year annual average of 2,044 fish during 2019–2023 to just 1,070 in 2024, a reduction of almost 48%.

Significantly, IFI reported that salmon smolt output at the monitored Tawnyard trap remained generally stable between 2018 and 2023, suggesting that declining survival after migration from freshwater may be an important factor in reduced adult returns. Although these findings do not establish the causes of mortality, they reinforce the urgent need to investigate changing marine conditions and other pressures affecting salmon survival, while ensuring that freshwater habitats and spawning stocks receive the highest possible protection.

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