

RESPONSE FORM

Catch Controls: byelaws for Nets and Rods 2017

Section 1

Q. 1a) About Yourself

Please tell us which one of the following categories best describes your primary interest in salmon and sea trout.

- I am a licensed net fishermen
- I am an angler.
- I represent a group of individuals who fish for salmon and sea trout (please tell us the name of the group).

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- I own or lease salmon and sea trout fishing
- I represent a salmon and sea trout conservation or environmental conservation organisation (please tell us the name of your organisation).

...**Atlantic Salmon Trust**.....

- I am involved in the catering industry and buy/sell wild salmon and sea trout (fish retailer, fishmonger, restaurateur, etc.)
- I am involved in the tackle trade for angling
- Response from Non-Governmental Organisation
- Other (please specify).

If more than one of these categories applies to you please select all relevant categories.

Q. 1b) What part of the country do you have an interest in?

Please tell us where you primarily fish for salmon or where the salmon that support your business are from.

- North Wales (Anglesey and North Gwynedd, Conwy, Denbighshire, Flintshire and Wrexham, Meirionnydd)
- Mid Wales (Montgomeryshire, Ceredigion, Radnorshire)
- South west Wales (Pembrokeshire, Carmarthenshire, Swansea, Neath Port Talbot and Bridgend)
- South east Wales (Ely and Vale, Taff, Rhymney and Ebbw, Usk and Wye)
- All Wales
- Other e.g. England/Ireland/Scotland (please specify) British Isles.....

If more than one of these categories applies to you please select all relevant categories.

Q. 1c) Please tell us how you found out about the Catch Controls consultation:

- From Natural Resources Wales
- From another organisation
- Through an organisation you're a member of
- Press article
- Social media e.g. Facebook, Twitter
- Through a meeting you attended
- Other (please specify).....

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We welcome your views on the catch control byelaws 2017.

Section 2

Q2a. Do you agree with Natural Resources Wales salmon and sea trout stock assessments?

Please tick the relevant box

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

Please explain your answer.

For salmon, the overall assessment is fully consistent with the ICES and other assessments of the state of salmon stocks. However, we do not agree that the classification for deciding which stocks need extra protection should be based on the predicted classifications in 5 years' time. These are not, in fact, predictions; they are extrapolations of the current trend line, albeit ones based on some sophisticated statistics. The evidence from the last few years shows that trends are not stable, and projections based on them are not a reliable indicator of what will happen in the future. This is demonstrated by the predictions made in 2011 for 2016. The number of rivers in Wales predicted in 2011 to be classified as Not at Risk in 2016 was 1, compared to none in the latest assessment; the numbers for Probably Not at Risk are 9 predicted, 2 actual; for Probably at Risk 6 predicted, 10 actual; and for At Risk 6 predicted, 11 actual.

Using predicted stock status as a guide for action to control exploitation is particularly problematic for stocks that are predicted to improve, since it would treat them now as if the improvement had already taken place. The AST considers that while predictions based on underlying trends are a useful indicator of possible problems and, taking a precautionary approach, can be used to justify action to try to avert these, they should not be used to justify a relaxation of measures before they have been proved to be effective and any resulting change in stock status has been shown to be lasting. On this basis, we consider that the Wye should be added to the list of vulnerable stocks in Table 11 in the Technical Case. While this would not have an immediate effect on rods, given that the Wye is subject to mandatory C&R, it would be of relevance to the regulation of the mixed stock net fisheries in the Severn, which exploit Wye salmon and are the responsibility of the EA.

It is true that there are other weaknesses in the current assessment system; these were considered in the EA/AST/IFM work shop on stock assessment held in July 2016, which explored a number of possible improvements. However, it is unlikely that the weaknesses are serious enough to be giving a false picture of the state of salmon stocks; there is no doubt that on many rivers these are in severe decline. In these circumstances, a precautionary approach requires action to be taken to mitigate this decline. Nevertheless, it is important that NRW work with the EA and Defra to explore ways of improving the assessment system, and are prepared to introduce any necessary changes and to review classifications in the light of the latest evidence

So far as sea trout are concerned, the AST shares the reservations expressed in the Technical Case about the CPUE assessment method previously used by NRW, and still relied on by the Environment Agency, which we do not consider fit for purpose. While this may provide an indication of stock level trends and, in particular, changes in trends, it does not, as the Technical Case makes clear, show how stocks are performing in relation to the biological potential of a river system. However, while we welcome the development of the alternative stock-recruitment based assessment, we note that the complexity of trout/sea trout stocks, and the wide variations in behaviours and life histories, makes any method of stock assessment problematic. It is essential that sea trout stock assessment is kept under review, and full account is taken of any conclusions reached by the ICES working group on BRPs for sea trout. NRW must be ready to modify assessments methods, and if necessary stock status classifications, in the light of experience and new evidence.

The points made above about the risks of using predicted stock status to make decisions

working group on BRPs for sea trout. NRW must be ready to modify assessments methods, and if necessary stock status classifications, in the light of experience and new evidence.

The points made above about the risks of using predicted stock status to make decisions about the exploitation of improving stocks apply equally to sea trout. For these reasons, we consider that the Llyfni and the Clwyd, which are both classified as Probably at Risk in 2016, should be added to the list of vulnerable sea trout stocks in table 12 in the Technical Case

Section 3

Q3a. Do you support the proposed Net fishing byelaws?

Please tick the relevant box

- Yes**
 No
 Don't know

If no, please state on what grounds your objection is based.

Q3b Do you support the proposed rod fishing byelaws?

Please tick the relevant box

- Yes**
 No
 Don't know

If no, please state on what grounds your objection is based.

Section 4

Q4a. Please tell us if you have any further comments that haven't been covered by the previous questions.

The AST believes that on rivers with threatened salmon stocks (ie rivers that are consistently failing to meet their conservation limits) it is essential to maximise the numbers of salmon that survive to spawn, and so as a matter of principle no potential spawner on such a river should be deliberately killed. We therefore support these proposals. The same principle should apply to sea trout, although we accept that the identification of the most threatened stocks is more difficult, given the uncertainties of the assessments methods, and that measures also need to take account of the relative importance of particular age classes to overall egg deposition. On this last point we would like to see a simple maximum size limit replaced by slot sizes protecting key elements of a population as soon as there is sufficient evidence available to develop these. In the meantime, we support the proposed maximum size limit of 60cm.

While we support the proposed byelaws, we consider that where necessary they should be amended to take account of the changes to the stock assessment methodology that we propose.