

POSITION STATEMENT ON ATLANTIC SALMON CONSERVATION

Atlantic salmon, the king of fish, is in crisis, close to extinction in some rivers and in need of urgent action



The Atlantic salmon has long been revered as the 'King of Fish'. Admired for its beauty and strength, it has long captured our imagination and provided food and fishing for centuries. Its economic value is estimated at £100M per year across the UK and Ireland. It is an indicator of high quality water habitat.

The Atlantic salmon is a truly international fish and has an intergovernmental organisation - the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organisation ([NASCO](#)) - devoted to its conservation and restoration. Ireland (through the EU) and the UK are members of NASCO and that brings benefits and obligations.

Stock status and outlook

It is widely acknowledged that stocks of wild Atlantic salmon across its range are in crisis and some southern stocks are threatened with extinction. Through NASCO, the high seas fisheries at Greenland and the Faroe Islands have been successfully regulated, giving confidence that measures at home will not be undermined by impacts on the salmon's marine feeding grounds. Despite this, the decline in salmon has continued as additional pressures, mostly man-made, mount up. In 2011 it was agreed that the goal must be to focus action on impacts in fresh, estuarine and coastal waters to maximise the number of healthy smolts migrating to sea. This aim was reiterated and strengthened by new science through the International Year of the Salmon in 2019. The salmon's plight was made better known in the David Attenborough [Wild Isles programme about fresh waters on 2 April](#).

Without real efforts to better address the causes of decline, salmon will become extinct in many rivers in its southern range, including in the UK and Ireland. Despite the gloomy prognosis there are notable successes where salmon have been restored and these should inspire efforts to conserve and restore this iconic fish in line with our international obligations.

Causes

The causes of the decline are a mixture of impacts across the range of habitats occupied during the salmon life cycle: from eggs to smolts in rivers and estuaries, to post-smolts and adults feeding at sea. Factors include climate change and other human pressures on the environment and salmon stocks.

Reduced survival at sea

Monitoring of the survival of salmon at sea shows a decline from 30% before the 1980s to less than 5% today. Reasons include climate change, changing environmental conditions in migration pathways,

changing by-catch in fishing fleets and illegal fishing. Sea cage salmon farming has very serious impacts with pollution of sea lochs, sea lice proliferation and escapee fish impacting the resident gene pool.

Restricted migration, poor spawning, survival and growth in rivers and estuaries, caused by:

- Climate change: higher water temperatures and changing flow patterns (floods and droughts);
- Barriers to migration to and from spawning and rearing habitats e.g. dams and weirs;
- Habitat degradation: river excavations, loss of bankside vegetation and siltation of spawning gravels;
- Reduced river flows: through abstraction for drinking, agriculture and industry;
- Poor water quality: sewage and farming pollution;
- Increased predation by birds and mammals, especially where delayed by barriers or low flows;
- Impacts on migration in estuaries: pollution, low freshwater flows, thermal releases and barriers.

IFM’s position on conservation and restoration of wild Atlantic salmon

1. The wild Atlantic salmon is in crisis, but there remains a great deal that could be done to conserve and restore this iconic species - with the will and the means.
2. It is imperative to protect vulnerable stocks and restrict catches only to where there is known to be a harvestable surplus.
3. Restore freshwater productivity and raise smolt survival, effectively and urgently.
4. Impacts of salmon aquaculture must be addressed such that all farmed fish are retained in all production facilities and all farms have effective sea lice management.
5. All restoration efforts in fresh waters and the sea will be pivotal in wild salmon survival.
6. Research and effective monitoring to advance the conservation of wild salmon must continue.

Urgent action is required

The Institute of Fisheries Management calls for **immediate and effective action by the Governments of the United Kingdom and Ireland** to:

- **conserve and restore the wild Atlantic salmon and their habitats** through urgent strengthening, application and enforcement of existing regulations;
- **deliver meaningful climate change actions;**
- **urgently ensure implementation of NASCO’s Resolutions, Agreements and Guidelines** for management of fisheries, habitat protection and minimising the impacts of salmon farming;
- **monitor and assess effectively** to test the benefits of actions and to understand better the threats and processes involved.

The Institute of Fisheries Management will:

- use its professional status to **influence the Governments** of the UK and Ireland, the European Commission and the wider salmon world to better conserve and restore wild Atlantic salmon;
- use its **observer status in NASCO** to press for full implementation of NASCO’s Resolutions and Agreements and further urgent progress towards achievement of the international goals;
- use its position to **inform the public and other conservation organisations to gain support** to influence governments to take action.

Without these, the Atlantic salmon WILL soon become extinct in parts of the UK and Ireland.

The [Institute of Fisheries Management](#) promotes, for the benefit of biodiversity and society, the understanding of sustainable fisheries management and aquatic ecosystem protection.