

# 2021 SALMON CONSERVATION POLICY

## CATCH AND RELEASE

Given the overall trend for decreasing catches in the Ness district, it is essential that the exploitation of all salmon is limited to protect the future of the fishery. Consequently, the Ness District Salmon Fishery Board's Conservation Policy for the 2021 season is as follows.

**From the start of the Season to 30<sup>th</sup> June, all salmon caught should be released as a 'spring' conservation measure.**

*Remember that **The Conservation of Salmon (Annual Close Times and Catch and Release) (Scotland) Regulations 2014** prohibits the retention of any rod caught salmon between 15<sup>th</sup> January and 31<sup>st</sup> March (inclusive), meaning that anglers **must** practice statutory catch and release during this period.*

**From 1<sup>st</sup> July to the end of the season, all hen fish of any size and all cock fish over 8 pounds (69cm/27 inches) must be released. Furthermore:**

- Only one cock fish weighing 8 pounds (69cm/27 inches) or less may be retained per angler per week (even if fishing multiple beats), with a maximum of two per season; and
- All coloured and unseasonal fish must be released, providing protection for 'spring' salmon throughout the season.

Guidance on the sex and condition of fish is provided overleaf (if in doubt please release the fish).

*Remember that **The Conservation of Salmon (Prohibition of Sale) (Scotland) Regulations 2002** make it illegal to sell rod caught salmon or sea trout in Scotland.*

**There is a historical presumption against the killing of salmon on the Rivers Moriston, Oich and Garry as a 'spring' conservation measure.**

## RESTRICTIONS ON BAITS AND LURES

Anglers should not fish with worm anywhere in the district before the 1<sup>st</sup> of July or after the 31<sup>st</sup> August. It is believed that a relatively high proportion of fish caught using this method are deeply hooked, reducing the survival rate of released fish.

*Remember that the **River Ness Salmon Fishery District (Baits and Lures) Regulations 2007** prohibits the use of prawns and shrimp (or any part of them) as bait when fishing by rod and line for salmon and sea trout throughout the Ness Salmon Fishery District. It also prohibits the use of worms as bait when fishing for salmon and sea trout in the part of the District above Dochfour Weir.*

At the beat's discretion, spinning is allowed as an option throughout the whole system. Any spinning lure or plug should have only one hook no bigger than size 6. Similarly, fly hooks should be no bigger than size 6. Preferably, all hooks should be single, barbless or crimped.

## CLOSE SEASON

The official statutory season for salmon fishing in the Ness district runs from the 15<sup>th</sup> January to 15<sup>th</sup> October. However, as a voluntary conservation measure (to protect spawning fish) the Proprietors have agreed that the start of fishing on the River Ness will be delayed until 1<sup>st</sup> February and that the last day of fishing above Dochfour weir will be the 30<sup>th</sup> September.

*This policy not only covers salmon but also those who fish for them. The Ness DSFB wants you, the angler, to return every year and anglers fishing the Ness system should always consider their own and other's safety. The Ness Board commends the use of lifejackets whether fishing from a boat or wading.*



## FISH HANDLING

The key aim of releasing salmon is to ensure that they survive to spawn. Angling and radio tracking studies have demonstrated high survival rates and successful spawning for salmon released after capture (up to 100 per cent in certain conditions).

If a fish is poorly handled, or kept out of the water for a prolonged period, its chance of survival is reduced. To give your fish the best chance of fully recovering from its capture and going on to spawn successfully, please follow these simple but important steps:

### Landing the fish

- Use a soft, knotless, meshed landing net and ensure that the fish remains in the water.
- Do not beach the fish, as abrasion can lead to infection.
- Minimise handling the fish. Fish should never be 'tailed'.
- If the fish is landed in a boat, ensure that it is laid on a flat, wet surface such as an unhooking mat (ideally unhook the fish in the net rather than bringing into the boat).

*Please note that **Section 3 of the Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries (Consolidation) (Scotland) Act 2003**, as amended by the **Aquaculture and Fisheries (Scotland) Act 2007**, prohibits the use of knotted nets, gaffs and tailers.*

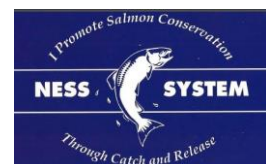
### Removing the hook

- The use of barbless or micro barbed single hooks is recommended, as they make removing the hook much easier.
- Wet your hands. A dry, bare, warm hand can cause abrasion which increases the risk of infection.
- Remove the hook gently. If possible use forceps or a hook disgorger, taking care not to squeeze the fish.
- If the fish is deep hooked or bleeding, snip the line as close to the hook as possible. This will cause less harm to the fish than removing it.
- Even if a fish is bleeding heavily, it can have a good chance of survival. **Don't kill a fish just because it is bleeding.**

### Returning the fish

- Try to slip the fish out of the net without touching it, let it swim away on its own.
- If you really must, then support the fish, in the current, facing upstream and when sufficiently recovered, allow it to swim away. Recovery may take some time so please be patient.
- Do not weigh the fish unless you are using a weigh net, but estimate the weight of the fish from its length.
- By all means photograph the fish, but please keep it in or just above the water.
- **DO NOT LIFT A FISH UP BY ITS TAIL** as this can result in internal damage and fungal infection.
- Record all fish caught and released

Further catch and release guidance, together with the latest catch and release statistics, can be found on the 'Catch and Release' page of our website at <http://ness.dsfb.org.uk/ness-system/catch-and-release-guidance/>.



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## How can salmon be recognised at the different stages of their life?

### Fresh-Run Salmon

Recognised by the pristine condition and bright silver flanks. Fish straight from salt water have loose, easily detached scales and many carry sea lice which drop off within a few days. Hen salmon (illustrated) have a tiny kype on the lower jaw, but unlike cocks they retain normal head proportions while in the river.



### Maturing 'coloured' Cock & Hen

**Cock:** The combination of "tartan" colours is typical although shades vary - the fully developed kype, used in fighting rivals, and the enlarged adipose fin, are the most consistent indicators of maturity.



**Hen:** These are usually less coloured than cocks of similar age and they never have enlarged jaws. This one will have spent a few weeks in river or estuary - note the coloured head and lack of true silver flanks.



### 'Unseasonal' Cock & Hen in Breeding Dress

**Cock:** The combination of 'tartan' colours is typical although shades vary - the fully developed kype, used in fighting rivals is the most consistent indicator of maturity.



**Hen:** This is a summer fish – 'springers' are often darker by spawning time while late entrants may still be silver flanked. Fully mature hens have soft, swollen bellies and spawning is imminent if they also have protruding vents.



### 'Unclean' Kelt

Kelts are salmon which have spawned. Usually identified by the thin shape, distended vent and presence of "gill maggots" on the red gill filaments, they are often encountered by anglers in spring when they regain a silvery appearance and can be mistaken for fresh run 'springers'. Kelts must be returned unharmed.



(Illustrations used with permission from the Atlantic Salmon Trust [www.atlanticsalmontrust.org](http://www.atlanticsalmontrust.org))

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