

# Tay Salmon News

*from the Tay District Salmon Fisheries Board*

## The 2018 season — catches down but dry weather a factor

With most of 2018's catch returns now in, it looks like the season total will end up somewhere between 4,500 and 5,000 rod caught salmon and grilse, about 500 or more down on 2017.

The cause was two fold. Catches were down on the average in all of the spring months (which had been increasing until recently) suggesting fewer spring fish last year. However, fishing conditions were atrocious during the heatwave of June and July and never good until a proper spate occurred in late September, a few weeks before the season's end.

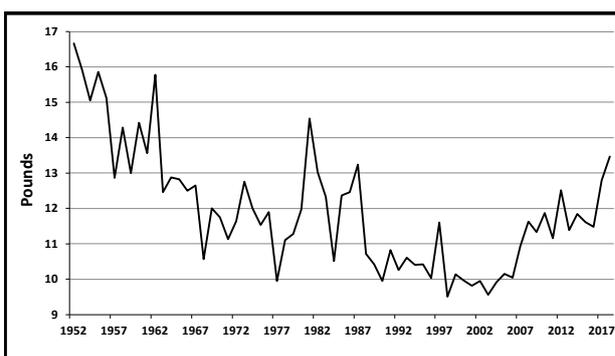
As in the previous two years, there were strangely few "fresh" fish in evidence in the autumn, though perhaps some more than in 2017. While the overall total for September was higher than in 2017, most of the fish caught in the flurry that followed the eventual spate were starting to colour up. These were "summer" fish that had not been seen when they were fresh because of the drought.

The reduction in some of the runs of fish was not unique to the Tay, but common to many rivers in eastern Scotland. This fact and poor returns from emigrating smolts tagged on the River Tummel in 2016 and 2017 indicate issues for salmon at sea.

But, while there were fewer fish around overall, catches would most likely have been better than they were under more normal summer weather conditions.

## Spring salmon continue to get bigger!

One thing that did increase in 2018 was the size of spring salmon. The average weight of salmon reported before 1 April has been steadily increasing for over 10 years. 2018 saw the weight increase again to a level not consistently exceeded for about 50 years. This is a result of an increasing proportion of larger (older maturing) 3 "sea winter" salmon in the catch.



2018 was the best year for 3SW salmon for years. Perhaps this will be followed this year by more really large 4SW fish, like this 35 pound cracker caught on the Glendelvine beat last February. We hope so!



## Hatchery set to expand

In 2018, over 1 million eggs were produced from the Board's kelt reconditioning hatchery. That was the first time so many had been produced since the Board took over the former Marine Scotland facility in 2011. It is likely that even more will be produced this spring. For the first time, the facility is at capacity, with all the holding tanks now being used to "recondition" about 250 adult salmon broodstock which will then produce more eggs in the autumn for the 2020 stocking.

Having now reached capacity, we are looking to expand this further. Work is now underway to remove a redundant concrete structure within the building which will open up a substantial new space for adding new parr rearing tanks this spring.



## Drift nets go at last!

The Environment Agency has recently announced that, following an aborted attempt last year, the remaining NE England salmon drift net fishery will be closed with immediate effect. While the Tay is not one of the biggest contributors to this fishery, tag recovery data shows that some Tay salmon did get caught there and some benefit to the Tay will result.

## Innovative DNA analyses help in River Garry Restoration

In November 2017, following the restoration of flow, some adult salmon were observed spawning in the River Garry for the first time since the 1950s. While these fish should be given the best chance, the Board considered that continued stocking with eggs from local reconditioned kelts was necessary to really kick start this population. Therefore, in spring 2018, approximately 190,000 eggs were stocked upstream of the area of natural spawning.

In autumn 2018, salmon fry were found by electrofishing to be relatively numerous in most of the stocked areas but less so in an unstocked area near Dalnamein but in good numbers around Clunes, also unstocked. Tissue samples were taken from over 700 fry which are being genetically typed by UHI in Inveness. By comparing these with the hatchery broodstock used, it should be possible to determine which fry are of hatchery origin and which are wild spawned, thus allowing the success of both natural recovery and stocking to be assessed. The long term aim of course is to restore a self sustaining population without need for stocking. This innovative work is being funded by SSE.



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