



# **RIVER AYR DISTRICT** **SALMON FISHERY BOARD**

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## **CODE OF PRACTICE**

The River Ayr District Salmon Fishery Board has produced this Code to conserve our fish stocks for now and the future.

### **1. Mandatory by Law:**

- (a) For the River Ayr, the Salmon & Sea Trout Season is from 11 February to 31 October inclusive. The Brown Trout Season is from 15 March to 6 October inclusive.
- (b) The Scottish Government Marine Directorate has designated the River Ayr as Poor (Grade 3) as part of Conservation measures enforced by the *Conservation of Salmon (Scotland) Regulations 2016* (as amended). **Therefore all salmon must be returned alive i.e. are subject to Mandatory 100% Catch & Release.**
- (c) In any event, it is a criminal offence:
  - i. to retain a salmon or grilse before 1 April, so they must be returned
  - ii. It is a criminal offence to kill a coloured/gravid salmon.
  - iii. All kelts must be returned.
- (d) All salmon, and grilse caught must be returned and recorded in your catch returns.

2. *Gyrodactylus Salaris* Declaration Forms must be signed by Anglers before fishing.

### **3. The Board recommends:**

- (a) The Board continues to pursue a voluntary agreement with anglers to delay the start of the salmon fishing season until 15<sup>th</sup> March each year.
- (b) On any spinning lure, only one treble hook should be used.
- (c) The use of barbless or crushed barbed hooks, so Anglers can return fish without unnecessary damage.
- (d) Against worm fishing for salmon. However, where worm fishing takes place, please use circle hooks, so Anglers can return fish without unnecessary damage.
- (e) Against the use of prawn, shrimp, or any organic baits at any time.
- (f) All sea trout and whitling are returned and recorded in your catch returns.

### **4. Safe landing and handling requirements**

Before you set off, make sure you have the following tackle for safe catch and release:

**Suitable tackle** - Use fishing tackle that is capable of landing salmon quickly to avoid exhausting them before release.

**Barbless hooks** – for quick release and minimised risk of bleeding when removing the hooks, always use a barbless hook. A size 8 (or preferably smaller) is recommended.

A **knotless net** – use a wide, soft knotless net to minimise damage by allowing the fish to lie flat as well as reducing damage to its scales.

**Tip:** to assist with a swift release make sure you have a tool, such as long-nosed forceps, at hand for prompt hook removal. Also, if you plan on recording or taking a photograph of your catch, make sure that you keep all the equipment close to hand so that this can be done quickly.

### **Landing the fish**

It's vital not to lift the fish out of the water; research has shown that salmon which are exposed to air, even for a short period, have a significantly reduced survival rate. Certainly do not lift the salmon by the tail or gill cover, as this can cause internal damage as well as damage to tendons.

### **Recording your catch**

If you want to take a photograph of your catch, keep the fish in the water or at least slightly above it and support the fish gently under its belly. When handling the salmon, always do so with wet hands to avoid damaging (burning) the fish's outer boundary layer of mucus – which protects it against disease and parasites. If you must weigh the fish, then weigh with the fish enclosed in the net or use a weigh net.

A tape measure or wading stick can be marked to record approximate length – this should be done while the fish is kept in the water. This can also be used against a chart to measure approximate weight.

### **Recovery and unhooking the fish**

Gently remove the hook by hand or with forceps when the fish is quiet. If it is deeply embedded, then cut the leader as close as possible to the hook. Generally, fish can be released and survive with the hook still attached and this will cause less damage to the fish than if the embedded hook is removed.

Recovery may take some time, but it is vital for fish to be allowed to recover before they are released into clean, steady water.

### **Download a helpful Best Practice Guidance from Fisheries Management Scotland:**

<https://fms.scot/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Best-Practice-Guidance-Catch-and-Release-January-2025.pdf>

## **5. Farmed Salmon / Pink (Pacific) Salmon**

If you capture a farmed salmon or pink (pacific) salmon, it should be humanely killed and the Board informed on the above contact details. Scale samples (in the case of pink salmon, the whole salmon) should be taken and sent to Ayrshire Rivers Trust.

The capture should also be reported on the Fisheries Management Scotland (FMS) Website Reporting tool at:

<https://survey123.arcgis.com/share/1b8632f1d06c48c89bbac8901d084346>

FMS Guidance on identifying farmed salmon can be found at:

<http://fms.scot/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/200908-Aqua-Guidance-for-Anglers.pdf>

Ayrshire Rivers Trust's video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WwKwPv1yGBM&t=271s>

FMS Guidance on identifying Pink (Pacific) Salmon can be found at:

<http://fms.scot/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/210519-INNS-Statement-Pink-salmon.pdf>

## 6. **Giant Hogweed / Japanese Knotweed / Himalayan Balsam**

See Ayrshire Rivers Trust leaflet at:

<http://www.doonfishing.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/ART-Invasive-Weeds-Information-30.06.21.pdf>

## 7. **Catch Returns**

Ayrshire Rivers Trust has helped the Board in developing a Catch Return App for use by anglers in the River Ayr catchment. This allows you to record your Rod Effort and Catches and upload details of the date, time and location to a central location, which will aid the provision of official Annual Catch Returns to both Scottish Government Marine Inspectorate and the River Ayr DSFB.

Download the App at:

<https://survey123.arcgis.app?itemID=562e8514d0d64a47a55849bd92ae4469>

Or use the camera on your phone to scan the QR Code:



## 8. **Safety**

Be aware of safety on and around the River. Anglers approach the River at their own risk.

**Please spread the word on this Code of Practice. Your Board are investing in the future so that we all can continue to enjoy the sport on the River.**