



RIVER AYR DISTRICT
SALMON FISHERY BOARD

ANNUAL REPORT 2024



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1. River Ayr District Salmon Fishery Board Members

Chair:

Alan Hill Barskimming Estate, Board Member

Board Members:

Charles McDade Sorn Angling Club, Board Member
 Alex Reid Cumnock & District Angling Association, Board Member
 Max Stobbs Mauchline & Ballochmyle Angling Club, Board Member
 Iain Walker Cumnock & District Angling Association, Board Member
 Robin Wilson Ladykirk Angling Club, Board Member
 Nick Wright Sorn Angling Club, Board Member

Gordon Millar Mauchline & Ballochmyle Angling Club (Salmon Fishers' Rep)

Associates:

Stuart Brabbs Ayrshire Rivers Trust
Struan Candlish Ayrshire Rivers Trust

Clerk: Iain K Clark (IKC) Gilson Gray LLP, Glasgow

2. River Ayr DSFB Members' Attendance

Date	Alan Hill	Nick Wright	Iain Walker	Max Stobbs	Alex Reid	Charles McDade	Gordon Millar	Robin Wilson
08/05/23	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓
15/05/23	✓	Apology		Apology		✓	✓	Apology
19/09/23	✓	Apology	Apology	✓		✓	✓	Apology
06/12/23	✓	Apology		Apology		Apology	✓	Apology
11/06/24	✓	Apology		✓			✓	Apology





3. Report from the Chair

Since taking up the post of Chair of the Board representing the River Ayr and its tributaries the last 14 months have been a steep learning curve.

I have known for several Months that our retiring Clerk, Mr Forbes Watson, was intending to leave the Board following an e-mail tendering his resignation. Forbes remained in place until we had our new Clerk in place and I am delighted that Iain Clark has taken up the post. Iain also carries the same duties for the River Doon and River Stinchar DSFBs.

I would also like to pass on the thanks of the Board and personally to Forbes for his many years of work for us.

Probably our biggest challenge was to get the Board on a stable financial footing with regards to unpaid levies from all over the system.

The system operated was very antiquated and required modernisation. On a positive note, we now have this all-in order and when you see our accounts later this will become clear. I would at this time however like to thank Jennifer Garland of Ayrshire Rivers Trust for the sterling admin work she has done regarding this to get us to our current position.

I was also very aware of a disconnect between the Board and Angling clubs on the system and I have taken some steps in attempting to rectify this with meeting representatives of Clubs to not only introduce myself but to put forward the current Boards priorities for the years ahead. This is ongoing and I expect to meet with others in the future.

In addition to this I would also like to take this opportunity to appeal to the Proprietors present to say that there is not enough representation from yourselves on the Board and personally I would be delighted if more could join and assist in the work being undertaken to restore the river.

The Board have commissioned a new 5-year Fisheries Management Plan and this is in its final stages with only a few minor changes and additions before it is completed. This is an excellent piece of work carried out by ART on our behalf.

This Plan will give the Board targets to move forward on to hopefully improve our system for all fish species. Already we have doubled our donation towards the control of invasive weeds by £2,000 to £4,000 for this financial year.

There is no doubt that Poaching on our system rears its ugly head when Salmon appear and in recent times persons have been wandering on to private and club waters and fishing without permits or permission for our Trout and Grayling.

I have sought a definitive answer on Warranted Bailiffs for the River and I have still to receive an answer regarding Insurance and Employer Liability from Scottish Government. I have however been making enquiries into the River Watcher scheme operated on the Doon and have made contact with and joined the Ayrshire Partners Against Rural Crime group where the three Ayrshire Wildlife Crime Police Officers attend and where they have co-ordinated a group of volunteers to Patrol the Doon and other areas where rural incidents are identified.

We currently have 3 volunteers who I have been speaking to who would be willing to join after training is provided. Again, this is ongoing.



Incidents of pollution on the system are all too common and as a Board we are giving extra support to ART by putting additional pressure on SEPA to deal more rigorously with offenders by submitting our own complaints.

I know that two particular species of birds, the Goosander and the Cormorant, can do particular damage to fish populations on a river and as such I will be, on behalf of the Board, Clubs and Proprietors, applying for licences to cull these species to be granted to nominated individuals after we have carried out Bird counts in the very near future.

To end my first Report as Chair, I would like to add that there is no doubt that Salmon numbers are getting critically low - not just in Ayrshire, but across the whole of the country. To finish I would also like to say that as a Board and working with our partners we will do everything in our power to ensure that we save the Salmon in our system and provide habitat for them so they have every chance to flourish.

Alan Hill
Chair, River Ayr
District Salmon Fishery Board

4. Statutory Remit

The River Ayr District Salmon Fishery Board was established under the 1862 and 1868 Salmon Fisheries legislation, as subsequently amended in the Salmon Act 1986 and the Salmon Conservation (Scotland) Act 2001. This legislation was later amalgamated under the Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries (Consolidation) (Scotland) Act 2003 ("the 2003 Act"), which has subsequently been amended by the Aquaculture and Fisheries (Scotland) Acts 2007 and 2013.

The River Ayr District Salmon Fishery Board is empowered under Part 3 of the 2003 Act to manage the protection, enhancement and conservation of the Atlantic salmon and sea trout stocks in the River Ayr. It also has a duty to ensure the general protection and improvement of the fisheries within their district.

(a) Aims of The Board

- Protecting and improving the fisheries within its district
- Increasing salmon
- Running a restocking programme in selected areas where low numbers of parr and salmon are identified.
- Encouraging responsible angling

The River Ayr DSFB works to raise the profile of the economic, cultural and environmental importance of the River Ayr to the local area, both among residents and visiting anglers.

The Board represents the interests of the River Ayr at regional and national forums.



(b) The Catchment Area

Ayrshire's largest river rises at Glenbuck Reservoir on the boundary of Ayrshire and Lanarkshire and flows westwards 63 kilometres to its estuary at Ayr on the Firth of Clyde. It has a catchment area of 574 sq. kilometres and its principal tributaries include the Greenock Water, Lugar Water, Water of Fail and Water of Coyle.

Principal land uses in the catchment area are agriculture, forestry, mineral extraction, leisure and recreation and urban development, the largest settlements being Ayr, Cumnock, Catrine, Ochiltree, Muirkirk and Sorn. Notable features include Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI's) at Howford by Mauchline and the Failford Gorge, and an opencast coal mining industry. Fish species include salmon, sea trout, brown trout, grayling, eel, stickleback, minnow and stone loach.



5. Summary of the Work done by the Board

(a) Report from the Clerk to the Board

A summary of the work done in the 2023/2024 season is noted below:

1. Meeting with, and various calls and correspondence over some months with the former Clerk and his secretary regarding information and documentation required to make an effective handover of the role; and to bring the Board's records up to date.
2. Dealing with the renewal of the Board's Registration as a data controller to process personal data with the Information Commissioner's Office under General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018.
3. Extensive correspondence and calls with various Riparian Owners, former Owners and New Owners, regarding outstanding Fishery Assessments; and preparing and updating a detailed Fishery Assessment Spreadsheet (on an almost daily basis) to update the Board's records, as payments were made, queries made and answered; and reporting to the Board.



4. Liaising with Ayrshire Valuation Joint Board to obtain Valuation Roll Extracts; and submitting updated records to have the Valuation Roll updated to reflect the updating of the Board's records
5. Letters to Riparian Owners and Tenants enclosing Fishery Assessment Notices, Reminders and Second Reminders
6. Detailed analysis of previous Assessment Rates and preparation of Reports for Board re Proposed Fishery Assessments Rates
7. Processing, and accounting for the payments of Fishery Assessments and Fishery Assessment Arrears and making payment of expenditure approved by the Board.
8. Review of financial position/Preparation of Finance Updates for Board
9. Correspondence with Azets regarding the preparation of the Draft Accounts to 28 February 2023 and 28 February 2024 and associated Corporation Tax Return
10. Issuing Calling Notices, collating and issuing Board packs, taking and extending Minutes for Board Meetings, including publication on the Board's Website and liaising with Ayrshire Rivers Trust and Fisheries Management Scotland for publication on their websites
11. Updating the Board's Angling Code of Practice, as directed by the Board, and in liaison with Stuart Brabbs of Ayrshire Rivers Trust.
12. Liaising with various Board Members, Stuart Brabbs of Ayrshire Rivers Trust and Fisheries Management Scotland, in order to draft, revise and submit responses to various Consultations (see below)
13. Calls, correspondence and virtual meetings with Fisheries Management Scotland, and SEPA, supported by Stuart Brabbs of Ayrshire Rivers Trust, regarding a number of matters, including SEPA Sea Lice Framework Consultation.
14. Advising on the possible introduction of a River Watch Scheme.
15. Drafting and updating various Good Governance Documents: Draft Policy on Members' Interests, Draft Meetings Protocol and Draft Complaints Procedure (with input and assistance from Martin Donachy and Peter Kennerley) and publishing those on the Board's website after approval by the Board, and sending to the Scottish Ministers in accordance with the Good Governance obligations
16. Liaising with CE Project Management regarding the proposed changes and updates to the Board's Website (www.Ayrfishing.co.uk)
17. Receiving and sending all correspondence for the Board.
18. Providing general advice and support to the Board, as required, including consideration of matters relating to Assessments, promotion of the Board's Code of Practice; and liaising with other clubs, associations and other organisations, as appropriate.



19. Sending letters to Riparian Owners, Clubs and Associations enclosing new Annual Catch Return Forms, sending reminders; collating Annual Catch Returns, updating the Board's records, and preparing summary spreadsheet for inclusion in Annual Report.
20. Preparation of the Draft Annual Report, including drafting and collation of reports from various Board Members and other contributors.

(b) Report on Fishery Assessments

Throughout the year, the Clerk to the Board prepared detailed Reports to the Board for their consideration. A summary of the key points to note from the Board's reasoning and decisions is below.

i. Introduction

The Board has the power under *section 44 of the Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries (Consolidation) (Scotland) Act 2003 Act* to impose Fishery Assessments, which are "...assessed at such uniform rate as is determined for all fisheries in the district by the board and shall be exigible according to the valuation of a fishery as entered in the valuation roll."

Therefore, the Board requires, each year, to determine the rate at which Fishery Assessments are assessed and issue Fishery Assessment Notices for payment by the Riparian Owners/Tenants. Ultimately, responsibility for payment rests with the Riparian Owners for the relevant year (which for these purposes, runs from 1 April to 31 March).

ii. Updating of the Board's Records regarding Ownership/Tenancies

It is critical that the Board's records are fully up to date, to ensure that the correct persons receive the Assessments, as well as other information issued by the Board.

Following the previous extensive work undertaken to comprehensively update the current Fishery Assessment List; the Clerk will continue to liaise with Ayrshire Valuation Joint Board to ensure that the Valuation Roll is updated in accordance with the Board's Records.

On many occasions this process is hampered by out of date information. A number of sales and transfers of ownership of land, associated Riparian Owners' rights and tenancies had not been notified to the River Ayr DSFB or to the Ayrshire Valuation Joint Board.

Could all Riparian Owners, Tenants, Clubs and Associations PLEASE notify us timeously of any change of ownership or tenancy, together with the date of transfer and any payment arrangements e.g. to apportion payment of Fishery Assessments. This will help us maintain accurate records and ensure that Fishery Assessments are sent to the correct persons.

Please also provide your email address and telephone contact numbers, which will aid more efficient communication with the Board generally (and help to keep costs down for the Board).



iii. Fishery Assessment Rate for 2024/2025

The Board requires to secure sufficient funds from Fishery Assessments to cover necessary expenditure to meet the Board's statutory obligations for the purpose of the protection or improvement of the fisheries within the River Ayr Catchment Area; and monies to help fund projects on the river, whilst also providing for some degree of contingency.

Historically, the Board was aware that COVID-19 caused problems for everyone, including the fishing community. As a consequence of lockdown, falling catch numbers, lack of fishing effort and the fact that some clubs had been struggling, the Board has kept the rates as low as it can, whilst noting the requirement to generate income in order to carry out its statutory functions.

The Board also considered that, after review of the new Valuation Roll from Ayrshire Valuation Joint Board (**AVJB**) with effect from 1 April 2022, there was a reduction of £22,395 (i.e. 43%) in the Value of the River to £29,520.

Therefore, taking account of all of the above, at its meeting on 11 June 2024, the Board fixed the Assessment Rate at 85 pence per £ for season 2024/2025. Fishery Assessment Notices will be issued in July 2024.





(c) Consultation Responses

The Board considers that it is an important part of its role to respond appropriately to Consultations from Scottish Government, the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) and other organisations.

During 2023, Responses to Consultations were made on behalf of the River Ayr Salmon Fishery Board as follows:

- i. On 15 September 2023, with assistance from Ayrshire Rivers Trust (“**ART**”), and liaising with Fisheries Management Scotland, the River Ayr District Salmon Fishery Board and the River Ayr District Salmon Fishery Board, the Clerk submitted a detailed response to the Scottish Environment Protection Agency Consultation on Sea Lice Risk Assessment Framework Consultation.

(d) Good Governance

- i. Introduction:

The *Aquaculture and Fisheries (Scotland) Act 2013* requires all District Salmon Fishery Boards to operate in an open, transparent and accountable manner.

The River Ayr DSFB has prepared this Annual Report in compliance with the Guidance on Good Governance Obligations:

- *Section 44 (1)* requires preparation of an Annual Report and a Statement of Accounts (which shall be audited) relating to the activities of the Board. The report and accounts are to be considered by an Annual Meeting of Qualified Proprietors.
- *Section 44 (1A)* requires the Clerk of the Board to arrange for the final Annual Report and Audited Accounts to be published and a copy of these to be sent to Scottish Ministers. Publication is to take place as soon as practicable after the Annual Meeting of Qualified Proprietors.
- *Section 44 (1B)* defines the final Annual Report and Audited Accounts as those submitted for consideration at the Annual Meeting of Qualified Proprietors or, if they are revised following that meeting, the revised versions.
- *Section 46A* requires that the Annual Report contains specific information: a summary of the activity carried out by the Board under their statutory functions in the reporting year; a summary of the proposed activity of the Board for the year to come; information on complaints made to the Board during the reporting period (their number, a statement of the nature of each and how it was disposed of); and a statement of how the Board has complied with the good governance requirements of the *Freshwater Fisheries (Consolidation) (Scotland) Act 2003* (“**the 2003 Act**”) during the course of the reporting year and how they propose to comply in the year to come.



ii. Statement of Compliance:

The River Ayr DSFB has introduced policies and documents, as detailed below, in order to comply with the good governance requirements of the 2003 Act. As part of this the River Ayr DSFB voluntarily adheres to the Scottish Government's District Salmon Fishery Boards Guidance on Good Governance Obligations (August 2013) and proposes to continue to comply in the year to come in the same way.

In particular, the River Ayr DSFB has operated as follows:

o Meetings Protocol

- The Board's Protocol on Meetings is published on the Board's website at: <http://www.Ayrfishing.co.uk/about-us/>
- Meetings of the Board were held on 8 and 15 May 2023, 19 September 2023, 6 December 2023 and 11 June 2024
- 11 members of the public attended Board Meetings in 2023/2024
- The minutes from these meetings will be posted on the Board's Website at: <http://www.Ayrfishing.co.uk/about-us/>
- The Annual Meeting of Qualified Proprietors and the Annual Public Meetings are due to be held on 17 July 2024 at The Mauchline & District Kilmarnock FC Supporters Club, 8 Earl Grey Street, Mauchline, KA5 5AD.
- A Calling Notice was issued to all Board Members and Qualified Proprietors. X members of the public chose to attend.
- The minutes from this meeting will be published on the Board's Website at <http://www.Ayrfishing.co.uk/about-us/>

o Declaration of Members' Interests

- The Board's Policy on Members' Interest is published on the Board's Website at: <http://www.Ayrfishing.co.uk/about-us/>
- The Register of Members' Interests and Declarations are retained by the Clerk to the Board and can be viewed on a written request to the Clerk
- We have included a standing item at each Board meeting inviting Board members to declare new/amend existing interests and all such instances are recorded in the minutes of these meetings.

o Complaints Policy

- The Board has set up and maintains a Complaints Procedure, which can be viewed on the Board's Website at: <http://www.Ayrfishing.co.uk/about-us/>
- The procedure is reviewed annually.
- There have been no formal complaints during 2023.

o Annual Report and Audited Statement of Accounts

- This Annual Report will be published on the Board's Website at: <http://www.Ayrfishing.co.uk/about-us/>
- The Audited Statement of Accounts will be published on the Board's Website at: <http://www.Ayrfishing.co.uk/about-us/>



- The previous Audited Statements of Accounts have also been published on the Board's Website at:
<http://www.Ayrfishing.co.uk/about-us/>

- Reporting to Scottish Government

Since these procedures have been introduced by the Board, the Board will be reporting to the Scottish Ministers using the following address:
DSFBGoodGovernance@gov.scot





(e) Code of Practice

The Board regularly reviews and revises the Code of Practice when required.

The Current Code of Practice is produced as follows:



RIVER AYR DISTRICT **SALMON FISHERY BOARD**

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Code of Conduct - Category 3 River

Category 3 means that ALL SALMON caught by anglers MUST BE RETURNED to the River.

The National Policy for Catch and Release of Salmon in a Category 3 River applies to the River Ayr.

It is MANDATORY that all angling clubs and anglers comply with this ruling.

Angling Clubs, Riparian owners and persons who issue permits are responsible and will be held accountable for informing anglers of the Code of Conduct.

The correct number of rod caught salmon returned to the river must be submitted with annual catch returns.

The Board bans the use of lead core and HDI fly lines.

The salmon fishing season on the River Ayr starts on 11th February and finishes on 31st October.

The Board however continues to pursue a voluntary agreement with all anglers for salmon fishing to start on the 15th March and finish on 31st October.

The Board recommends that barbless hooks are used at all times.

The Board recommends no worm fishing in October.

The Board also recommends that ALL SEA TROUT ARE RETURNED to the river.



(f) Scientific Report



Ayrshire Rivers Trust

working to improve Ayrshire's rivers and lochs

The River Ayr DSFB Proprietors Meeting and AGM 17thth July 2024 - 7.30pm & 8.30pm Ayrshire Rivers Trust's report

General

ART continues to support all aspects of the DSFB's operations. We act as advisers and consultants to the Board, and represent the DSFB's interests to SEPA, developers or any stakeholders as we engage with new proposals or developments that come to light. Our extensive scientific knowledge of the catchment and fish stocks has been gathered over 24 years and this enables us to present strong challenges/support as required to protect river habitat and fish stocks that are so challenged currently. The new Clerk has benefitted from our knowledge of historic Board operation as he settled into the role and worked with ART to ensure good representation in all consultations and at every opportunity.

With governance matters taking up much of the DSFB's operation in the last year, we are pleased that the River Ayr DSFB continues to modernise and are looking forwards towards delivering pragmatic actions that will improve fish stocks and angling and fulfil their statutory role. The Board will soon appoint a 'Riverwatch' coordinator to oversee their new 'Riverwatch' scheme. I'm sure the Chair or Clerk will say more on this.

We have provided a list of recommended actions at the end of this report for the DSFBs consideration.

Catch records and returns – the new App for anglers

The Clerk and Board were keen to streamline the official catch return process that is often very poorly completed. The fact that both the DSFB and the Marine Directive (MD – formerly Marine Scotland) require the same data on different forms at the same time of the year leads to confusion. With government (MD) requiring anglers to record their rod effort now added to annual catch reporting requirements, ART have developed a new phone app that should make these data easier to submit and collate.

Using GIS (Global Information Systems), our new web-based App will allow anglers to report their catches in real time to the Board using their mobile phones. Catch reports submitted by anglers can now include length and weight of fish, the beats and or pools fished, rod effort, photos of any fish captured, signs of disease or pollution discovered and all submitted in real time. SEPA should always be informed of pollution points directly but we encourage anglers to let ART know too. We are happy to take suggestions from anyone using the App if they feel improvements could be made.

Anglers will still be required to submit returns to the proprietors/clubs but in time the App may offer a suitable alternative once fully adopted. The app is currently being tested by a limited number of beats but should be available to roll out for wider use soon. Only time will tell how the anglers take to reporting directly using their phones but we hope this will be seen as beneficial by all owners, clubs and anglers and encouraged. Perhaps the Board or clubs should offer a small prize for the most proactive angler using the app?



Fishery Management Plan

The Fishery Management Plan produced by ART for the Ayr Board has been further integrated into national fishery management planning process that the Marine Directive, Fishery Management Scotland, the DSFBs and Trust network supports. It is regarded as a step in the right direction by most.

Staff at the Trust further developed an online FMP for the River Ayr that added to work already completed locally for this Board. Essentially, the national FMP process looked to assess progress against targets and funding shortfalls within Scotland's fisheries. Having catchment-based estimated costs for restoration highlights the vast funding gap within the sector. With the current and very worrying salmon crisis and declining numbers of anglers, DSFB are challenged just to survive let alone fund restoration. These new online FMPs will be used to lobby ministers for increased funding or to attract green finance from corporate sponsors. This is increasingly seen as an under developed source to fund river and environmental restoration. ART are already in negotiation to secure investment from a large corporate body looking to invest in the environment.

ART estimated the funding shortfall for the River Ayr catchment alone was just over of £7.5million at current rates as a minimum. The online FMP can be found by following the link below

<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/collections/0f6b2fbb82cd4785b29b268aebce38a9?item=10>

Invasive Weeds Control

The Board continued their support to control non-native invasive plants within the catchment. While it remains a landowner responsibility to prevent the spread of these plants from their land to neighbouring properties (under the Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2011), it is universally accepted across Scotland that DSFBs are perhaps the only statutorily empowered organisations realistically able to either deliver control or coordinate this type of work.

In Ayrshire it has been the Trust that led with invasive species control since 2008. On the Ayr, the greatest priority was given to bringing Giant hogweed under control. In recent years, the DSFB has contributed financially to this work which has been greatly appreciated by the Trust as we approach the very real prospect of eradication (although that is still expected to be a few years away). It takes time and money each year but we continue to make excellent progress in our strategy.

The Board is also concerned about the spread of Japanese knotweed in the catchment. In 2023 we agreed to undertake limited control at high-risk areas (areas where the plant may be disturbed). This was performed and will be revisited this year within our current invasive weeds agreement.

However, the Board members recognise that eradication of this plant would help improve bank stability, reduce erosion and nutrient inputs for the benefit of fish and wider biodiversity. It also requires additional investment if eradication or large-scale suppression is to be a realistic aim. The lower river is most heavily affected but the Lugar Water appears to be suffering from increasing abundance and with this comes an elevated risk of spread to beats downstream. ART has provided a proposal for the Board to consider that will allow a strategic controlled approach to be delivered. This proposal is included at the end of this report.

Himalayan balsam is another priority species but at this time, there is little hope of any strategic control. ART will treat areas as we can but the owners and Board must embrace the need for action if there is to be any effective reduction in this plant.



Nethermills Counter - Progress so far

A year on and we continue verifying counter data from 2023 as evermore data are recorded daily. As data accrues it is increasingly obvious that we will never manage to manually review a complete year of fish signals generated by the counter. However, a great deal of progress has been made and the counter accuracy is improving. In time we hope to use Artificial Intelligence (AI) to speed up the verification and counting process and we await the outcome of a funding application that would allow this to be developed by our staff.

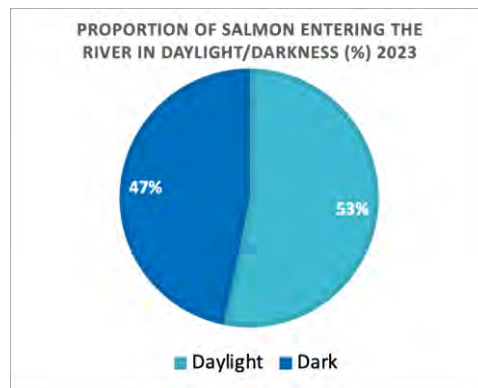
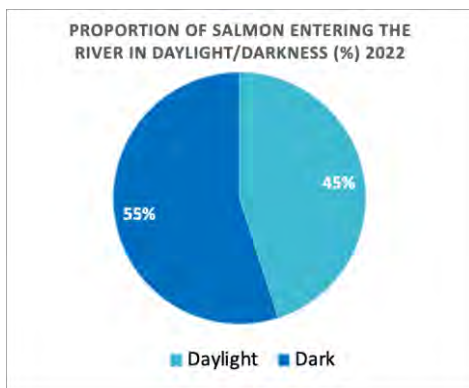
Changes were made to the counter set up and recording methods earlier in 2024 by the Marine Directive following problems highlighted by ART. Improved low light counting was achieved by the addition of an Infrared Panel and another overhead camera will soon be installed, but ultimately, we expect the counter will accurately count fish up and down and the manual verification requirement process will reduce as confidence in the results is achieved.

What have we learned so far?

Early running fish (May to August) appear to make up the majority of the runs currently returning to the Ayr catchment. However, almost constant high-water levels (thus poor visibility) throughout the latter part of 2023 and counter signal errors means that most of these data have yet to be verified or rejected. It is possible that significant numbers of fish did enter during this period but at present we can't confirm this.

As an example of what we have learned about July runs, here are some facts we know.

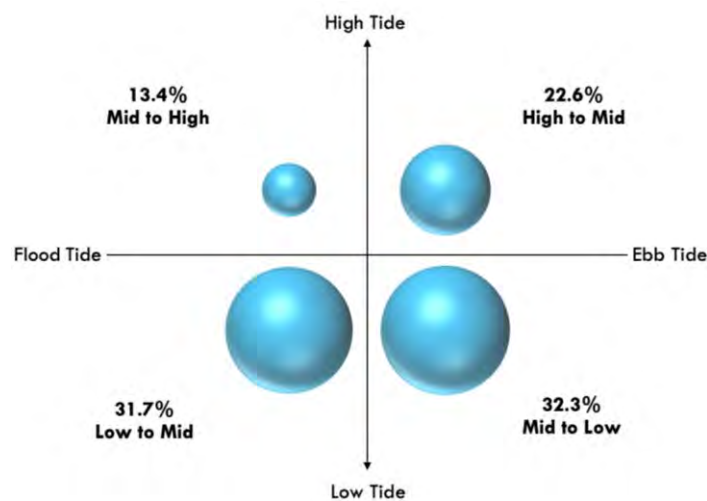
- In 2022, we looked at 18 days or part days. We confirmed that 474 salmon entered the river through the counter on these days. 25% of these fish were multi sea winter Salmon and 75% were grilse (one sea winter fish). The breakpoint between MSW and Grilse was calculated at 68cm length.
- In July 2023, more than 523 grilse and salmon entered the river through the counter over 19 days or part days. 69% of these fish were grilse and 31% were Multi sea winter salmon (again the break point was 68cm).
- Salmon appear to prefer to enter the river from dusk until dawn and particularly under the cover of darkness however the charts below show actual numbers recorded. It appears a fairly even split but there are so few hours of darkness each day during July that they obviously select the overnight window of opportunity unless there are high water levels.





Comparison of fish entering the river during daylight or darkness in July 2022 and 2023

- On initial assessment, and rather surprisingly, it appears salmon favour the bottom end of the tidal range to enter the river, however, we feel this may be skewed by the pool between the weirs. Potentially considerable numbers of salmon may wait between the two dams for darkness before they continue upstream, particularly during lower flows. The DSFB paid ART to install a remote-controlled security camera on the counter and dam to ensure that any illegal activity can be detected. Several people have been reported to Police Scotland that were detected fishing illegally.

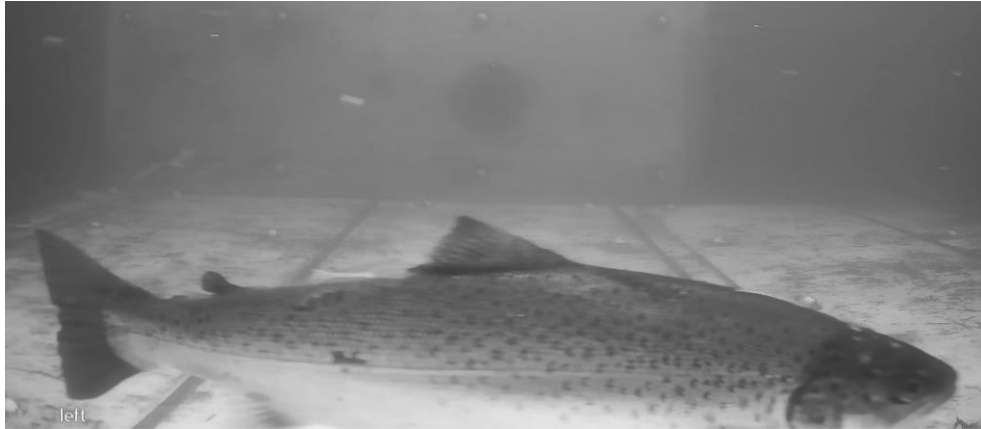


The stage of the tide at which salmon pass through the upper weir and counter.

- The largest confirmed salmon recorded passing through the counter was around 95cm long or circa 22 – 25lbs in weight.
- In 2023, the counter recorded 30.6% of the fish moving upstream correctly. It also recorded false counts adding to the error factor, hence the reason it is so important to verify manually and confirm actual numbers.
- Few sea trout have been observed returning to the river on the days assessed yet the river is naturally well populated with brown trout. Less than 40 sea trout have been recorded over the 2 seasons of operation (most days have yet to be reviewed).
- Sea trout appear to be highly susceptible to sea lice infestations. This is less obvious on salmon.
- There is a regular exchange of small trout between the river and the tidal areas downstream in both directions but these are not considered sea trout.
- The largest trout recorded in 2022 was 77cm in length. It was blind in both eyes and in very poor physical condition with a very heavy lice load.
- The largest trout recorded in 2023 was 47cm in length again carrying a heavy lice load (see the image below).



- The counter is useful to health check returning fish and potentially to identify diseases such as red skin disease or red vent syndrome or non-native species such as Pink Salmon that showed up in the lower reaches of the Ayr in 2023 for the first time.



47cm trout carrying a large number of sea lice as it returned from the sea.



A 28cm sea trout with severe sea lice infestation and in very poor physical condition

Electrofishing and monitoring

ART monitor juvenile salmonid stocks on the river each year. While numbers have declined since this began in 2003, the Ayr and Lugar both continue to support salmon and trout with some areas much more productive than others.

It is through the process of continual assessment that we have the knowledge and understanding of factors limiting productivity and where problem areas lie. As more data is gathered, we also have opportunities to look at trends that may appear and therefore these long-term data sets become increasingly valuable as they cover more and more lifecycles. With a 4 to 5 year lifecycle, it is a slow process to assess any single year's salmon production and the number of resulting adults surviving to spawning after their marine migration. The Nethermills counter data should complement the juvenile stock assessments generated by electrofishing.

Smolt monitoring would be beneficial in some respects but it is a very expensive operation and introduces risk that may be considered too great as numbers decline. However, we are considering ways in which this may be done using the counter at Nethermills but there are limitations with this too.

Anyone wishing to speak to the biologists about current stock levels are encouraged to contact the Trust or arrange to come and see us.



Barriers

We are working with SEPA to secure agreements for the removal of three barriers within the catchment that will open up considerable habitat for migrating salmonids. There is no requirement for investment from the DSFB however we may require letters of support and encouragement for the owners. More on this as things develop.

Pollution

We continue to regularly find pollution within the catchment from silage effluent escaping poorly designed clamps or poor storage practices to slurry applications running off directly into our rivers as a result of poorly timed applications. These are failures that we pass to SEPA for action however there is very little positive feedback to report from this.

Similarly, we see inappropriate dredging incidents and these too contribute to problems of reduced water quality and fish survival. Damaged habitat takes years to recover if at all.



On the left, Slurry run off heading straight into the river and on the right, dredging that will cause silt pollution for years to come. No fish survive within this burn and it is not surprising. Just two examples of the failures we see regularly.

SEPA recently reported Bathing Water failures on the Ayrshire coast. Bathing Water Quality appears to be their main driver for enforcing environmental regulations within priority catchments such as the Ayr. These failures potentially have a huge economic impact on tourism so we can only hope that the Land Team within SEPA take direct action to tighten up on breaches of the Controlled Activity Regulations within the catchment.

We encourage anglers, proprietors and anyone discovering pollution or damage to contact SEPA immediately and please let ART know too. Only by continually reporting do we have any real chance of improvement.

Pink Salmon

During eDNA sampling for Pink Salmon in 2023, one of two rounds of investigations indicated that this species had entered the river and spawned in the lower reaches last year. This is a worrying development and as yet we don't fully understand how this may impact the native population of salmon and trout.

To date in Scotland records have all followed a biennial pattern as does the species lifecycle. Therefore, the next season we ought to be concerned about is 2025. However, this morning we received confirmation of a Pink Salmon being captured on the River Spey and more spotted. This somewhat goes against the biennial theory and we must therefore remain vigilant every year. Please ensure any of these fish spotted or captured on the Ayr are reported to ART and Fishery Management Scotland.



Pink Salmon image courtesy of Atticus Albright of the Spey Foundation - captured on 11.07.2024

(g) Annual Catch Returns

See attached - to be finalised.



(h) Audited Statement of Accounts

The Audited Statement of Accounts to 28 February 2024 are produced here:

RIVER AYR DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD

FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 28 FEBRUARY 2024



REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT EXAMINERS

TO THE MEMBERS OF THE RIVER AYR DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD

We have examined the financial statements on pages 2 to 4.

Respective responsibilities of Trustees and examiner

The board's Trustees of River Ayr District Salmon Fishery Board for the purposes of company law, are responsible for the preparation of the financial statements in accordance with the terms of the Charities and Trustee Investments (Scotland) Act 2005 and the Charities Accounts (Scotland) Regulations 2006. The Trustees consider that the audit requirement of Regulation 10(1)(a) to (c) of the 2006 Accounts Regulations does not apply. It is my responsibility to examine the financial statements as required under section 44(1)(c) of the Act and to state whether particular matters have come to my attention.

Basis of independent examiner's statement

My examination is carried out in accordance with Regulation 11 of the 2006 Accounts Regulations. An examination includes a review of the accounting records kept by the charity and a comparison of the financial statements presented with those records. It also includes consideration of any unusual items or disclosures in the financial statements and seeks explanations from the trustees concerning any such matters. The procedures undertaken do not provide all the evidence that would be required in an audit and consequently I do not express an audit opinion on the view given by the financial statements.

Independent examiner's statement

In connection with my examination, no matter has come to my attention:

- (a) which gives me reasonable cause to believe that in any material respect the requirements:
- (i) to keep accounting records in accordance with section 44(1) (a) of the 2005 Act and Regulation 4 of the 2006 Accounts Regulations; and
 - (ii) to prepare financial statements which accord with the accounting records and comply with Regulation 8 of the 2006 Accounts Regulations; have not been met or
- (b) to which, in my opinion, attention should be drawn in order to enable a proper understanding of the financial statements to be reached.

Azets
3 Wellington Square
Ayr
KA7 1EN

11th July 2024

**RIVER AYR DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD****INCOME AND EXPENDITURE STATEMENT****FOR THE YEAR ENDED 28 FEBRUARY 2024**

	Year to 28.02.24	Year to 28.02.23
	£	£
INCOME		
Assessments	20,622	21,708
Bank and Building Society Interest	<u>867</u>	<u>-</u>
	<u>21,489</u>	<u>21,708</u>
EXPENDITURE		
Fisheries Management Scotland Annual Membership	536	600
Fishery Management Plan	1,500	2,000
Ayrshire River Trust GHW Control	-	2,000
Ayrshire Rivers Trust Admin Fee	1,625	2,700
Ayrshire Rivers Trust Annual Contribution	6,789	6,405
Correction of Accruals	(6,078)	-
Pollution Control	-	1,825
Hogweed Control	4,000	-
Clerk's Fee	4,208	850
Attending Conference Costs	338	-
Accountancy Fee	750	600
Subscriptions	-	1,085
Bad Debts (2014 – 2020)	14,474	878
Postage & Stationery	224	561
Depreciation	-	211
Reconciliation - Disposal of Assets	1,195	-
Sundry	<u>164</u>	<u>129</u>
	<u>29,725</u>	<u>19,844</u>
Surplus/(Deficit) for year	(8,236)	1,864
Surplus brought forward	<u>38,794</u>	<u>36,930</u>
Surplus carried forward	<u>30,558</u>	<u>38,794</u>



RIVER AYR DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD

STATEMENT OF FUNDS ON HAND

AS AT 28 FEBRUARY 2024

	As at 28.02.24	As at 28.02.23
	£	£
ASSETS		
Tangible Assets	-	1,195
Deposit Account	30,832	42,074
Debtors – unpaid assessments	<u>1,476</u>	<u>14,473</u>
	32,308	57,742
LIABILITIES		
Deferred Income	=	(8,778)
Accruals	<u>(1,750)</u>	<u>(10,170)</u>
	<u>30,558</u>	<u>38,794</u>
Represented by:		
Retained surplus	<u>30,558</u>	<u>38,794</u>

The financial statements were approved by the board on 17 July 2024

.....
Chairman



RIVER AYR DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD

NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 28 FEBRUARY 2024

1. ACCOUNTING POLICIES

- Except to the extent noted below, the financial statements include cash income and expenditure received and paid during the period.
- Liabilities and income outstanding at 28 February 2024 have been incorporated in the Financial Statements.



6. Future Work of the Board

(a) Proposed Works for Discussion/Agreement



Ayrshire Rivers Trust
working to improve Ayrshire's rivers and lochs

Recommendations to the DSFB for the coming season

Invasive Weeds Control

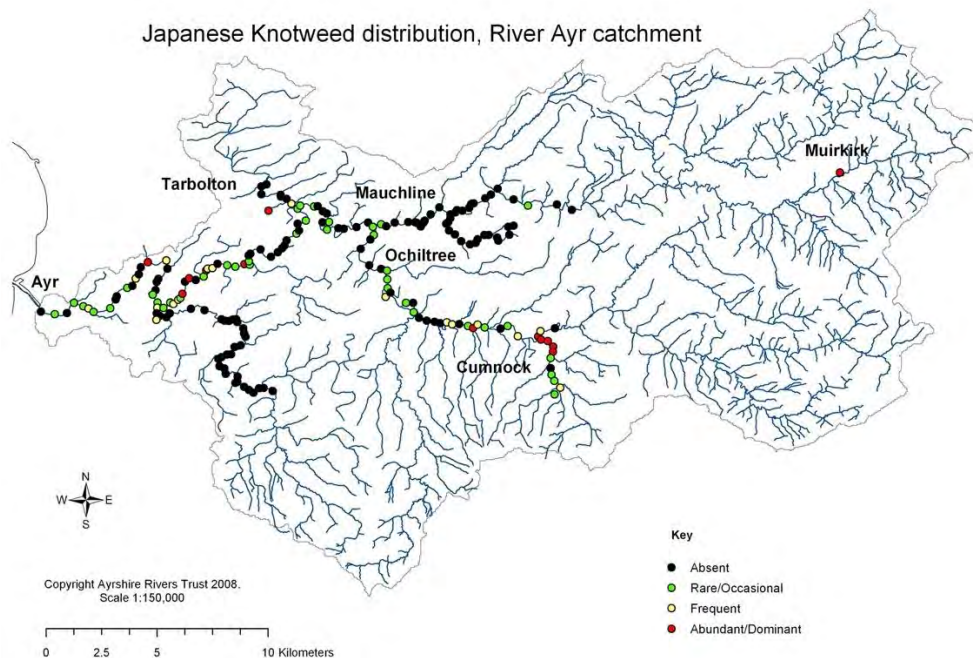
Giant Hogweed

Continue to financially support ART with Giant Hogweed control. This has been a huge investment of time and money from ART since 2008 and in recent years the contributions from the DSFB have enabled us to continue catchment wide control that may otherwise have failed through a lack of funding. Currently £4000 is provided annually but this includes for around £1000 towards a limited amount of Japanese knotweed control in priority areas.

Japanese knotweed

The Board may wish to consider supporting strategic Japanese knotweed control. This would continue from where we started last year at Cumnock, progressing down the Lugar water injecting every stand as we reach it. The worst affected areas are on the Glaisnock Water and Lugar near Pennyfadzeoch to Ochiltree. From there, sporadic stands occur downstream to Stair bridge where the plant increases rapidly affecting both banks from there to the lower reaches. The map below shows historic distribution but this will only have increased since the date surveyed. ART has tackled limited stands over the last 4 years however, much greater investment is required to reduce the occurrence of this plant within the catchment.

Japanese Knotweed distribution, River Ayr catchment



Japanese knotweed distribution in 2008



ART recommends the Board allocates whatever funding they can afford to continuing with strategic control. We suggest an annual investment of £3000 - £4000 should bring significant results over a period of no less than 5 years.

Chalk River Restoration Project

The DSFB has agreed to contribute match funding (£1500) towards the restoration of the Chalk River, A.K.A The Mauchline Burn. This burn is responsible for continual silt deposits reaching the River Ayr. The Trust has secured around £17,500 to allow fencing and bank stabilisation to take place with the aim of reducing silt inputs.



The Chalk River confluence with the Ayr. This silt deposit has built up since the last spate. It is a continual problem

Fencing

The Board could fund fencing to exclude livestock, perhaps at 50% contributions towards the costs with landowners providing the other 50%. There are currently no better grants available anywhere.

The Bogend Burn at Catrine and the Glenstang Burn at Stair are two burns that would benefit from such investment. There are other areas at Wellwood Bridge that would benefit too however gaining landowner consent may be difficult.



The Glenstang Burn at Stair where livestock access leads to pollution and destroys habitat. A burn of this size should be an important salmon spawning habitat however, they are rarely ever produced

However, with livestock fencing costing around £15/m (depending on the number of strainers/gates etc), the cost is prohibitive and the Board may wish to accrue reserves before embarking on such actions. Never the less, fencing can quickly transform habitat and improve water quality and we have achieved great success with this approach on the Doon catchment with support from the Doon DSFB.



A Doon burn transforming after fencing was erected just 8 months ago. The substrates are clearing of silt and the bankside vegetation is recovering. SEPA failed to achieve and significant improvements despite many complaints from the Trust over several years.

Tree Planting

Tree planting along spawning burns and south banks will help defend against anticipated impacts of climate change by providing shade and cooling water temperatures. They also stabilise river banks but do require protection from livestock. Combining tree planting with fencing is sensible. Again, the cost can be prohibitive but ART has several thousand trees and second-hand guards available to plant next winter where trees are lacking. The Board could organise a volunteer event and the Trust would provide equipment and secure landowner agreements in advance. There would be a small cost for the staff time involved and for stakes but this would deliver actions identified within the two FMPs.

The Board would have to set some reserves aside to deliver this.

Stuart Brabbs, Trust Manager



7. Acknowledgements



RIVER AYR DISTRICT **SALMON FISHERY BOARD**

Thanks the following for their support in its work:



Ayrshire Rivers Trust

working to improve Ayrshire's rivers and lochs

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www.youtube.com/user/ayrshirerivertrust

Funders and partners:

- All River Ayr District Salmon Proprietors and Tenants
- Fishery Managers, Ghillies, Club and Association Committee Members
- Fisheries Management Scotland
- Accountants: Azets, Ayr
- Solicitors: Gilson Gray LLP, Glasgow
- Web hosting and Domain Renewal: CE Project Management
- Police Scotland
- Scottish Environment Protection Agency
- Ayr Joint Valuation Board
- Peter Scanlan, Assistant to the Clerk
- The many landowners who allow access and work to be undertaken
- And other volunteers who give up their time to support our efforts

Clerk to the Board: Iain K Clark, LLB (Hons), Dip LP, NP
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