

Mixed Stock Netting: The Facts

In September 2015, the Scottish Government announced that it was “to prohibit the taking of Atlantic salmon out-with inland waters” for the next three years (from 2016 to 2018 inclusive). In other words, coastal salmon netting was to be banned with immediate effect. This signalled the successful conclusion to the long-running S&TA/S&TC Scotland campaign to stop mixed stock coastal netting. Our formal complaint to the European Commission under the Habitats Directive, lodged in June 2014 ([See Complaint](#)) was instrumental in forcing the change in Scottish Government thinking.

The European Commission concluded that there was a case for Scotland to answer and, faced with potentially very substantial fines for infraction if the matter went to the European Court of Justice, the Scottish Government conceded. The Commission’s investigation triggered by the S&TC Scotland complaint left Scotland with no choice but to act. This was confirmed by Cabinet Secretary Richard Lochhead in evidence (on the closing of the nets) to the RACCE Committee on 9 March 2016: “The European infraction proceedings are.... real. At any point this year, the European authorities could take us to the European Court of Justice..... For the record, I note that the Salmon and Trout Association made the complaint to the European authorities that, no doubt, partly led to where we are today.”

Coastal netting will only recommence if, following a review, it is deemed (on the basis of evidence) to be sustainable.

Recent history of mixed stock netting:

For most of the last four decades (indeed until very recently) the extent of active net fisheries in Scotland has declined. The demise was driven from the 1980s by the decline in marine survival and consequently the number of fish returning to our coasts, combined with the increasing availability of cheaper farmed fish, which had a dramatic impact wild salmon prices and thus on the commercial viability of salmon netting for wild stocks. Since the millennium two distinct salmon markets have developed – a mass market for farmed salmon and a premium market for wild fish. In the right locations salmon netting continued to be lucrative. Between 2012 and 2014 there was a significant increase in Scottish coastal netting with existing/active stations being worked more intensively and some long-dormant stations being re-opened. The number of salmon killed in nets in 2013 was 50% higher than in 2012.

At the NASCO annual meeting in 2014, the Scottish Government representative conceded, under questioning from us ([See http://www.nasco.int/pdf/reports_other/2014ThemeBasedSession.pdf, pp](http://www.nasco.int/pdf/reports_other/2014ThemeBasedSession.pdf)

14-16), that there had been a quantum leap in the coastal salmon netting catch in 2013, that in the last three years Scotland's largest netting company had acquired the fishing rights to an additional 12 miles of coastline and that dormant netting stations had been allowed to re-open without the Scottish Government carrying out an appropriate assessment on the likely impact on salmon rivers with Special Area of Conservation status. Furthermore, he accepted that it was simply impossible to determine whether the weakest stocks were being protected from indiscriminate killing in nets as Scotland, in contrast to most members of NASCO, had yet to set conservation limits for individual rivers.

It was evident at the 2014 NASCO meeting that Scotland was determined to allow coastal netting to continue and indeed increase. We were left with no alternative to lodge a complaint with the European Commission – which in due course forced Scottish Government to back down.

Why we fought so hard to stop Scottish coastal netting:

Mixed stock coastal netting stations indiscriminately catch any salmon passing by, regardless of where they are heading or the strength of the population in their home rivers. They are completely non-selective, making the management of individual river stocks almost impossible. In addition, 17 rivers in Scotland are designated as Special Areas of Conservation. The random nature of mixed stock fisheries makes it extremely difficult to determine the impact of such fisheries on these important conservation sites.

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