



FINDHORN ANNUAL REPORT 2025

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword	3
FINdhorn Fishery Board	4
Management Structure	5
FINdhorn district	6
The Fishery	7
Salmon and Sea Trout Catches 2025	7
Catch and Release – 6 Simple Steps:	11
Fishing During Periods of Hot Weather and High-Water Temperatures	11
Conservation of Wild Salmon Stocks	12
Juvenile Fish Surveys	13
FISHERY Management	15
Poaching Control	15
Predator Monitoring and Control	16
Fish Eating Birds	16
Seals	17
American Mink	18
Wind Farms	19
Fish Disease	22
Pollution Incidents	25
Education and Publicity	25
Acknowledgements	26

FOREWORD

To say that 2025 was a difficult year would be an understatement. The exceptionally low water levels throughout most of the season and the severe saprolegnia outbreak in the Spring both led to desperately low catch numbers. This was compounded by the unnecessary fish kill on the Dalmagarry burn.

More and more, an increasing number of developments are being proposed within our catchment at a time when salmon are so critically endangered. Wind turbines may help the salmon from a climate change point of view but the effect on the river itself is very hard to measure. In this report you will see that there are 97 turbines in the catchment at the moment with a further 173 either consented or in application. If all these go ahead, the cumulative effect on the river could be severe. Other industrial developments that need to be monitored include the A9 dualling, the Moray Flow Park and the increase in the number of chicken farms. You can read more about all of this in the report below.

Saprolegnia is a severe threat to the run of Spring fish in the Findhorn. Work continues to try to understand this pathogen and we liaise closely with Professor van West and his team at Aberdeen University. There appears to be little we can do to prevent outbreaks, but it is critically important that all river users are encouraged to follow thorough biosecurity measures.

My thanks go to Sean and Alister, Elise for her work on the non-native species and to Elle and her team at the FNLRT. The workload seems to increase every year, and we are lucky to have such a dedicated team working for us.

Anthony Laing

FINDHORN FISHERY BOARD

Chair

Anthony Laing (*Coulmony*)

Board Members

Alasdair Laing (*Findhorn Salmon Fishings Ltd*)
(*Retired*)

Alec Laing (*Findhorn Salmon Fishings Ltd*)

Alex Leven (*Glenferness Estate*)

Colin Cawdor (*Cawdor Estate*)

Andrew Howard (*Moray Estates*)

David Paton (*Dalmigavie Estate*) (*Retired*)

Murray Wilson (*Glenmazeran Estate*)

Michael Barron (*Forres Angling Association*)

Colin Glynne-Percy (*Tomatin Estate*)

Rob Hoskin (*Lethen Estate*)

Note: Forres AA will be represented by Michael Barron or James McKay depending on availability.

Co-optees

Mark Laing (*FNLRT*)

Campbell Ross (*Findhorn Angling Association*)

Staff

Elle Adams (*FNLRT Executive Director*)

Ollie Smaje (*FNLRT Ecologist*)

Sean Maclean (*Head Bailiff*)

Alister Taylor (*Assistant Bailiff*)

Clare Walker (*FNLRT Office Manager*)

Clerk

Anthony Laing

Address

Fisheries Office, Logie Steading, Dunphail, Forres, IV36 2QN.

Emails

Chair: anthony@shortbreadhouse.com

Ecologist: ollie@fnlrt.org.uk

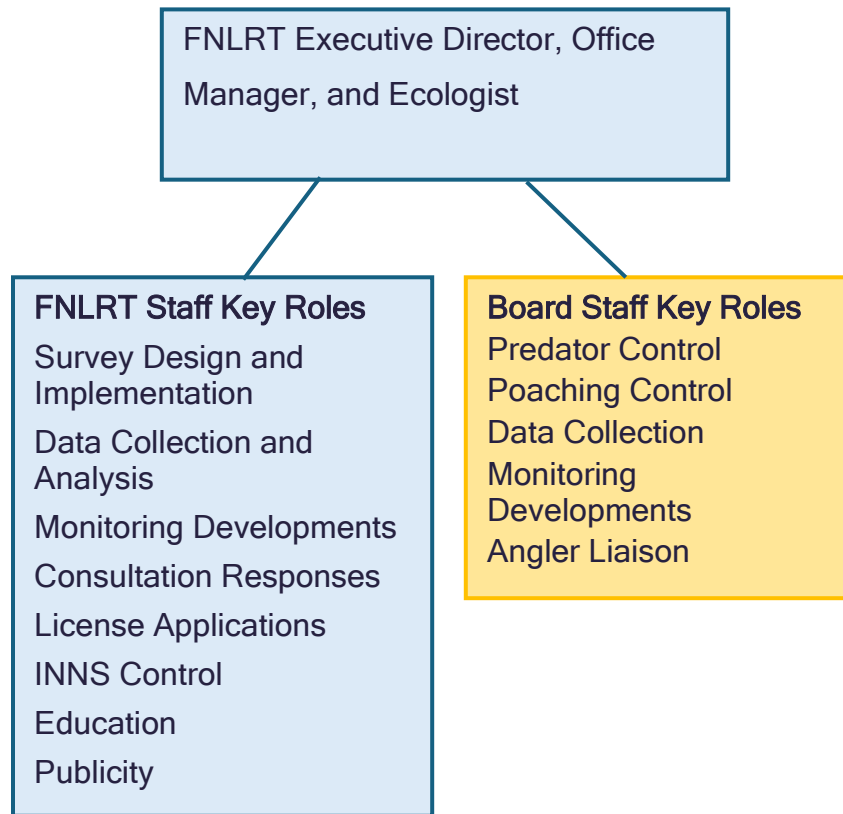
Office Manager: admin@fnlrt.org.uk

Web Site: <https://www.fnlrt.org.uk/fisheries-boards/river-findhorn/>

Management Structure

The Findhorn Fishery Board is a statutory body constituted by the Salmon Fisheries Act of the 19th century and has a legal management responsibility for protecting and enhancing the salmon and sea trout populations within the Findhorn district.

The Findhorn, Nairn and Lossie Rivers Trust (FNLRT) is an independent charity which promotes sustainable management of river resources and fish populations through research, restoration and education. The Trust works with the Findhorn Board to provide management and scientific advice and administrative support.



Findhorn Board and FNLRT management structure

Management Plan

The [Management Plan 2021-26](#) underpins the work for the Board and Trust and encompasses six key priorities, Climate Crisis, River Habitat and Land Use, Biosecurity and Invasive Non-Native Species, Fish and Fisheries, Marine and Inshore Environment, Education and Awareness.

Staff

The bailiffing team is led by Head Water Bailiff Sean Mclean and ably assisted by Bailiff Alistair Taylor.

FINDHORN DISTRICT

The River Findhorn has a catchment area of over 1,300km² and a stream network length of about 1,500km, of which the main river comprises 90km. The catchment is split between two Local Authority administrations, which are the Highland and Moray Councils.

The Findhorn Fishery District (Figure 1) includes the River Findhorn and its tributaries plus 35km of coastline in the Moray Firth, from Burghead to the east of the Findhorn estuary to The Bar in the west. The District extends 3 nautical miles out to sea (Figure 1). The Muckle, Mosset, Kinloss and Burgie Burns are also included within the District.

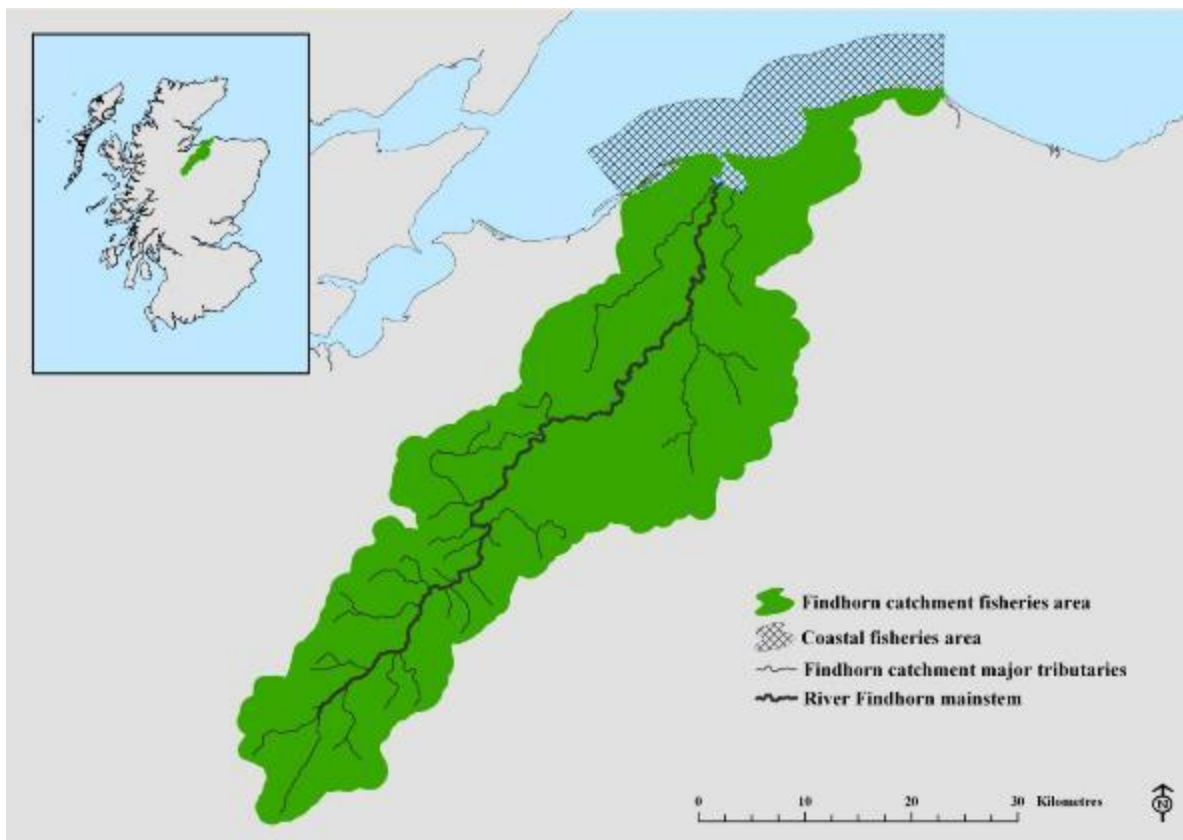


Figure 1: River Findhorn catchment and coastal district.

Further information on fisheries management on the Findhorn and Scotland in general is available on the following web sites:

[Findhorn Nairn and Lossie Rivers Trust](#)

[Fisheries Management Scotland](#)

THE FISHERY

Salmon and Sea Trout Catches 2025

The river was opened for angling on Tuesday the 11th of February by Elle Adams, the incoming Executive Director of the Findhorn Nairn and Lossie Rivers Trust, with the traditional dram of Benromach offered to the river. It didn't take long for the first fish to be caught on the 12th of February, by Joseph Owen at the Railway Pool. Despite this promising start to the season, dry warm weather set in and spring catches to the start of May were poor, with 53 fish caught, compared to 221 in the same period in 2024.

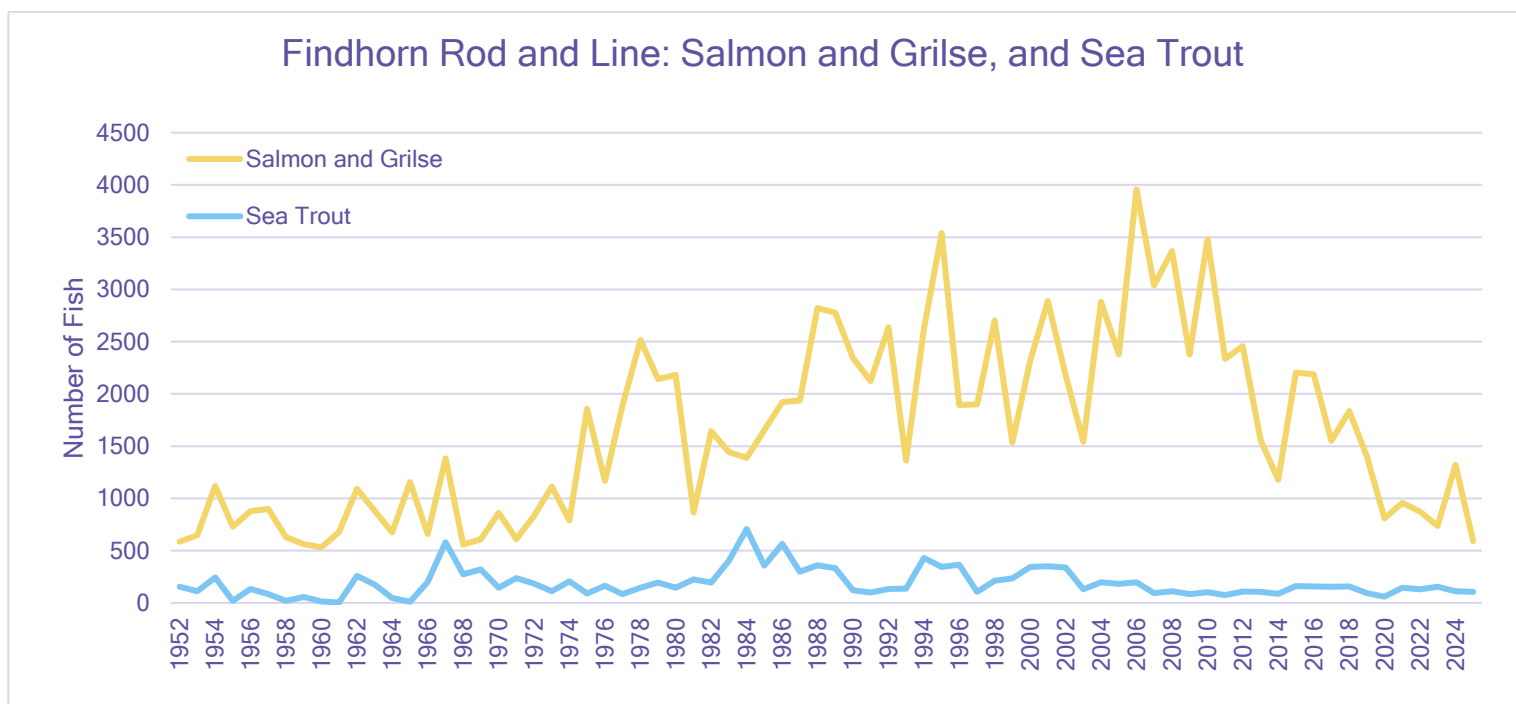


Figure 2: Salmon and grilse, and sea trout rod catch for the River Findhorn from 1952 to 2025.

These dry conditions persisted, and a severe outbreak of Saprolegnia in the spring fish followed, which is discussed in more detail below. As well as the loss of many fish to the disease, fishing conditions were extremely poor. The Board recommended that proprietors close angling on the river from the 14th of May. The goal was to limit physical stress on any fish caught that would make them more susceptible to infection with Saprolegnia. Another benefit was a reduction in the likelihood of transmitting strains of Saprolegnia

between rivers. The situation was reviewed, and the recommendation was removed on June 2nd in light of a rise in river level and fresh fish entering the system. Reports of disease had reduced, and the higher water levels allowed fish to distribute more widely through the system.

After this extremely challenging time, water levels remained low throughout the season. In July rises allowed an improvement in catches, though fish weren't seen to ascend as far up the river as expected. Low water levels prevailed until another good rise in mid-September.

Angling conditions for the season were poor, and the total reported catch of salmon and grilse for the season was 591, the lowest rod and line catch since 1968. In 1968 however, 4,352 salmon and grilse were caught in the net and coble fishery, and 2,265 in fixed engines, in addition to the 560 caught by angling for a total catch of 7,150. The run of salmon is clearly smaller now than it was at that time.

Based on scale reading data, we know that most salmon in the Findhorn spend two years rearing in fresh water before migrating to sea as smolts, with some taking 3 years. Most multi-sea-winter salmon spend 2 winters at sea, with some spending 3 winters. Thus, grilse returning in 2025 were spawned in 2021 or 2020, and salmon were mostly spawned in 2020 or 2019. Rod catches were on the lower side in these years, but the angling effort was reduced due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and poor angling conditions were noted in 2021. This suggests that the runs of salmon in these years likely weren't as small as the catch figures suggest. and that a good number of smolts will have been produced in 2022 and 2023 (2025 salmon) and 2024 (2025 grilse).

In light of this, it is likely that a combination of poor conditions for angling, adult mortality due to disease, and critically, poor smolt to adult survival at sea, are the main factors contributing to the low catches this year.

The Board are delighted that anglers have continued to adopt a very positive response to catch and release recommendations and are contributing to safeguarding stocks for the future. Release rates for salmon and grilse were 90.25%, and for sea trout were 94.5%.

Conservation Code 2026

In view of the current scarcity of Atlantic Salmon in our Scottish rivers, the Board would encourage anglers to release as many fish as possible. The conservation code below is an absolute minimum that should be achieved. In addition to the catch and release policy, this code contains guidance on how to maintain biosecurity measures, best practice to increase the success of catch and release and advice on angling in high temperatures. We encourage adoption of this guidance.

BIOSECURITY

1. Anyone who goes fishing should be aware of the risks of transferring diseases and invasive non-native species (INNS) on clothing and equipment. By practising good biosecurity, you are helping to minimise the spread of non-native species, plant and animal pests, as well as their parasites and diseases.
2. Follow the 'Check, Clean, Dry' principles of biosecurity:
 - Check** - your equipment and clothing for live organisms - particular in areas that are damp or hard to inspect.
 - Clean** - wash all equipment, footwear and clothes thoroughly. Use hot water where possible. If you do come across any organisms, leave them at the water body where you found them.
 - Dry** - all equipment and clothing at 20 degrees centigrade or more for at least 2 days or deep freeze for at least 1 day
3. For example:

Gyrodactylus salaris – a highly infectious parasite which has badly affected Salmon stocks in Norway can live outside of a fish host for up to 7 days in damp conditions (Source: FishPal.com).

Haracleum mantegazzianum – Better known as **Giant Hogweed**, the seeds of this dangerous invasive plant species have a dormancy of up to 15 years (Source: GB Non-Native Species Secretariat).

FINDHORN CONSERVATION CODE

RELEASE: Up to and including the 14th May,
anglers must,

*Release all salmon and grilse
Are encouraged to release all sea trout and finnock*

RELEASE: From 15th May,

All salmon over 9lbs / 28inches (4kg / 72cm)
All Sea Trout over 4lbs / 21inches (1.8kg / 55cm)
All coloured, stale and gravid salmon/grilse/sea trout
As many female hen salmon/grilse/sea trout as possible

RELEASE RATE: Anglers are asked to achieve a minimum of:
75% of all salmon/grilse caught **from the 15th of May**
75% of all sea trout and finnock caught from **11th February**

KEEP RATE: Guidance only as Release Rate above should take priority:
A maximum of 1 salmon (under 9lbs) or 2 grilse (fish under 4lbs) per rod per 6 days.

METHOD: Before 1st May fly fishing is encouraged, most beats are fly only all season. From 1st May it is mandatory. Pinched or barbless hooks are recommended and avoid using triple hooks.

*If an angler catches a fish that they feel is likely not to survive, then the angler can retain it, but they must report immediately to the estate, the head bailiff, **Sean McLean 07920 483081**, or the FNLRT, **Ollie Smaje 07887 535986**, who will decide what to do with the fish. This course of action also applies to all fish, which would normally be returned throughout the season under the FDSFB Conservation Code.*

Catch and Release – 6 Simple Steps:



1. Use the strongest practical nylon cast to aid quick landing of fish. Long playing leads to the build-up of harmful metabolites such as lactic acid which kills fish even after they appear to swim away unscathed.

2. Use single or double hooks but avoid using triple hooks. Pinch the barbs by carefully crimping them with slim-jawed pliers. This is better than using barbless hooks.

3. Plan your release strategy as you are playing the fish - think where the best area would be to net or beach, unhook & release your fish. Avoid sandy beaches and silty bays, and where there

are extensive areas where the water depth is shallower than the depth of the fish.

4. Take great care in handling fish. It helps if there are two of you so try and fish in pairs. Do **not** pick the fish up by the tail and carry it to the bank for unhooking purposes. If possible, use a wide-mouthed small knot-less mesh net to minimise handling, remove the hook, and release the fish while still in the water. Wet the hands first or use surgical gloves and wet them as well, avoid the gill area, do not squeeze the stomach and take care not to rub off scales. Turning the fish upside down will often prevent it from struggling. Use your knees or the riverbank to keep the frame of the net level and just above the water surface.

5. Use long-nosed artery forceps or slim-jawed pliers for removing hooks.

6. Try to minimise out of water and handling times. Return the fish as quickly as possible. Some photographers keep fish out of the water far too long, reducing their chances of recovery. Support it until it has recovered enough to swim away.

Fishing During Periods of Hot Weather and High-Water Temperatures

1. Salmon start to become uncomfortable at water temperatures of 20°C (68F) or more and there is documented evidence that with a water temperature above 20°C salmon may not survive C & R.

2. Early morning fishing is best from a welfare point of view as the water temperature will be at its lowest. As the day wears on into the evening on a hot sunny day the fish will be very reluctant to show any interest in taking a fly. A reduced fishing effort at this time decreases the chances of over-stressing the fish as there is still an element of stress caused by fishing over them.

3. If a fish is hooked the playing increases the fish's requirement for oxygen, and as warm water holds less of it, they can struggle to catch their breath when released. Great care must be taken to unhook the fish in the water and not remove it to improve its chances of survival on release. The fish should be gently held upright in the water until it is fully recovered so allow plenty of time before releasing it.

Conservation of Wild Salmon Stocks

The Findhorn retains its 'good' river grading for the 2026 fishing season. River gradings are determined by the Marine Directorate of the Scottish Government based on catch return data, periodic juvenile density data from the National Electrofishing Programme for Scotland (NEPS), and fish counter data. This data is used to predict the likelihood of meeting the conservation limit (CL), which is the number of adult salmon required to maintain the population sustainably. More about how this is calculated by the Marine Directorate can be found in their [explanatory video](#).

To ensure that the river remains in 'good' status going forwards, it is imperative that anglers submit catch returns to proprietors, and that this data is submitted to the Marine Directorate. It should be noted that the 'good' river grading means that the current low level of exploitation is predicted to be sustainable, but doesn't mean that the multiple threats to the salmon population on the Findhorn can be disregarded.

Good At least an 80% mean probability of CL being met in the last 5 years.

Advice provided to the District Salmon Fishery Board indicating that exploitation is sustainable therefore no additional management action is currently required. This recognizes the effectiveness of existing non-statutory local management although a Conservation plan for the future must be prepared.

Moderate 60-80% mean probability of CL being met in the last 5 years.

Management action is necessary to reduce exploitation. Mandatory catch and release will not be required in the first instance, but this will be reviewed annually. Production of a conservation plan is required in consultation with Marine Scotland.

Poor Less than 60% mean probability of CL being met in the last 5 years.

Exploitation is unsustainable and mandatory catch and release (all methods) for 1 year will be required. Management action is necessary to reduce exploitation and production of a conservation plan is required in consultation with Marine Scotland.

The Findhorn remains at Good for 2026

Juvenile Fish Surveys

Juvenile surveys are carried out by electrofishing and provide useful information about the distribution and abundance of juvenile fish. These are sometimes funded by the Marine Directorate to feed into the river gradings, but also carried out independently by the Board and the FNLRT.

The Marine Directorate have not funded the National Electrofishing Programme for Scotland for 2026. This is the electrofishing programme which feeds into the river gradings, and hasn't run since 2023. It is hoped that this will be funded for next year as this will provide valuable data for the Marine Directorate to feed into their conservation gradings.

One site was surveyed by the Board and FNLRT, on the Moy Burn. High densities of fry were recorded, though densities of parr were low compared with other tributaries of comparable size (Figure 3). This is in line with previous data on the Moy Burn, which has been historically heavily modified, and has a uniform substrate and flow characteristics through large sections upstream of loch Moy. While this area provides suitable habitat for spawning, it provides little habitat or cover for Parr, an issue which has long been recognised.

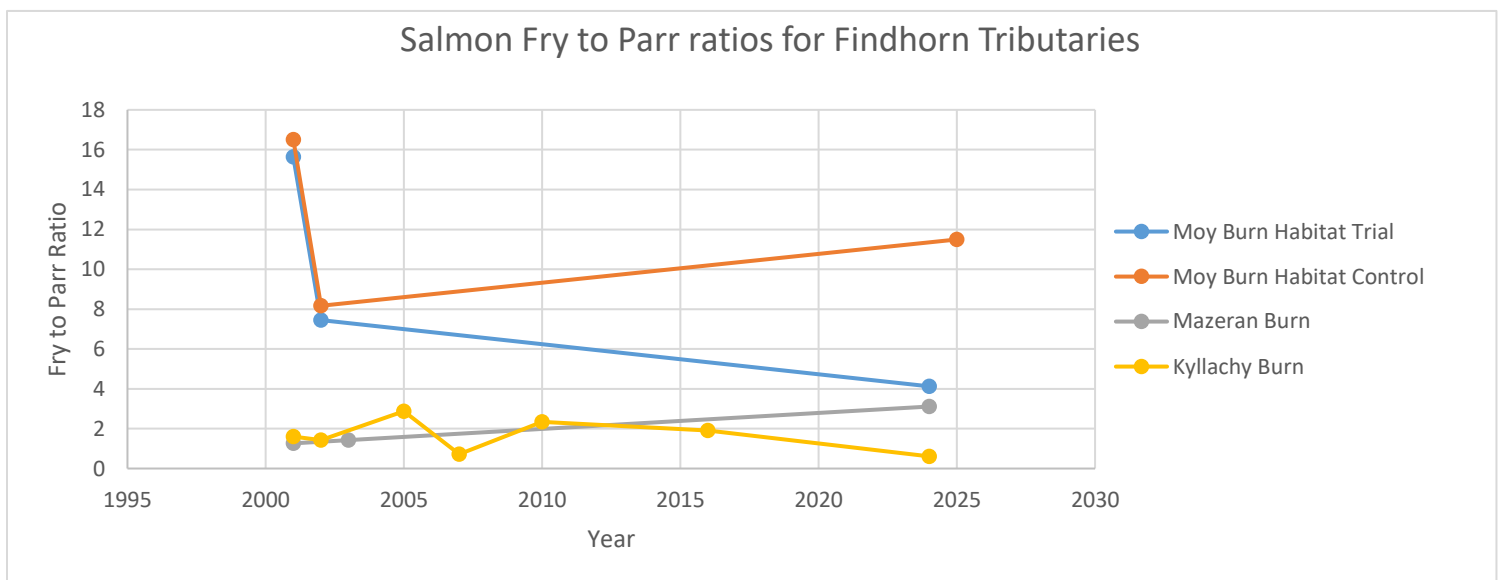


Figure 3 Fry to Parr ratios for selected tributaries of the River Findhorn. On the Moy Burn there are fewer parr per fry than on other nearby tributaries.

Some trial habitat improvements involving boulder installation were carried out in 2001, but were small in scale. There is some evidence that in these areas, more parr are retained than in other areas of the Moy Burn (Figure 3). In the habitat trial sites where boulders were installed, there was a lower fry to parr ratio in 2024, than in the control site which was fished in 2025. There is large interannual variation however, so a better measure of the success of the trial habitat work will be to fish these sites and the control sites in the same year.

It is unknown whether the comparatively low parr densities in the Moy Burn are caused by migration to more suitable areas, or fry to parr mortality. In either case, improvements to the habitat within the Moy Burn would be beneficial for increasing smolt output. Through the Findhorn Watershed Initiative, the catchment restoration partnership of the FNLRT, the Trust is currently in discussions regarding large-scale channel and floodplain restoration throughout this reach. This will create benefits for fish, hydromorphology, and the wider ecosystem, as well as increasing the amount of habitat available.

FISHERY MANAGEMENT

Poaching Control

Fish poaching occurs across Scotland in a range of forms, from illegal netting to fishing without permits. To apprehend and deter poachers Sean Mclean and Alister Taylor, the Water Bailiff team, conduct regular patrols throughout the year. Poaching can occur at any time, so the timings of patrols are varied throughout the week and during the day. The entire river is covered including the bay and the coast. Additional patrols are also carried out along the River Lossie which are funded by the Lossie District Salmon Fishery Board. During 2025 there were 25 poaching incidents.

The bailiffs utilize a good range of equipment to assist them in their duties and have recently acquired new thermal imaging devices and a drone funded by Marine Fund Scotland in a collective funding bid by Fisheries Management Scotland. They also utilize a tracking system when patrolling individually.

The bailiffs attended an enforcement meeting in March where the procurator fiscal discussed the penalties available for poaching offences. As of January 2026, the maximum fines have been increased after pressure from Fisheries Management Scotland. The maximum fines are now £10,000, or £40,000 in the most serious cases, and can be applied on a per-fish basis. Link to news release [here](#).

The year started slowly with few incidents through May, partly due to the saprolegnia outbreak. In June the number of poaching incidents increased a little with 2 on the bay and 2 on the main river, including an incident where a group attempted to net the river but had fled the scene before they could be apprehended. A poacher who was caught in 2024 on a Sunday was given a fine by the procurator fiscal.

During July poaching activity increased again with 16 incidents. This included a case where the bailiffs caught up with a poacher after his vehicle was recognized in town. August and September were quieter again, with only 2 poaching incidents each month.

During September there was an issue with an angler who had previously been caught poaching, who was fishing one of the beats as the guest of another angler who had booked the fishing. While the angler had been banned from booking fishing through FishPal this didn't stop them angling as a guest of someone

else. The proprietor understandably didn't want the poacher fishing their water even as a guest, and the host was advised as such.

The bailiffs were due to attend court in September in the case of a poacher who was apprehended in 2024. The poacher ultimately pleaded guilty however, so was handed a fine by the procurator fiscal.

**If you observe or suspect illegal fishing (poaching) is underway
Please contact**

Findhorn Bailiffs:

Sean Mclean 07920 483081

Alister Taylor 07387 302649

Email: seanmclean268@btinternet.com

or

Police Scotland

999 or 101

Do not attempt to apprehend the poachers

Predator Monitoring and Control

Fish Eating Birds

Sawbill ducks (goosanders, mergansers) and cormorants feed on juvenile salmonids as well as other fish species such as eels, minnows and sticklebacks. It is thought that the effect on salmonids is greater on Northern rivers such as the Findhorn, where there is less diversity of prey species.

Typically, five counts are carried out throughout the year, in Jan/Feb, Mar/Apr, May, Oct, Nov/Dec. and are organised by Alistair Taylor. Counts are carried out by walking each section of the river simultaneously, between 09:00 and 11:00. In Findhorn Bay, counts are compiled by observers from several fixed points



Left: Male Goosander (photo Gordon Rennie), right Female Goosander (photo Graham Bell)

around the Bay. We are extremely grateful to all the estate staff and keepers who joined the bailiffs and FNLRT Ecologist to complete the counts.

Seals

It remains extremely unlikely that licenses will be granted for the lethal control of seals to protect fish stocks. This has been the case since 2021 when legislation changed, and the position of the Marine Directorate has seemingly shifted to a presumption against granting seal control licenses. In the few cases they have been granted in recent years, the conditions of the licenses have made it very difficult to fulfil the cull.

A consultation on the licensing system was undertaken in 2025 and completed by the trust on behalf of the board. A simplified licensing process with clearer guidance on what information was required was requested, as well as more evidence led management with further research into seal diet noted as an important avenue to pursue. Concerns were raised about lack of consultation when designating the Findhorn haul-out site, and the lack of an effective licensing system despite the endangered status of Atlantic salmon in the UK.

Research is underway in Scotland into detect and deter systems which detect seals entering rivers and switch on an acoustic deterrent device (ADD). Initial trials have been reported to be promising, with better results than leaving an ADD running. It is thought that seals can become accustomed to ADDs if they are

left running, and this new system may reduce this. Once the trials are concluded and these become available, it would be worth assessing their suitability for the Findhorn.

American Mink



Elise Cox (Scottish Invasive Species Initiative) continues to maintain the mink monitoring raft and trap network across the area with the help of dedicated volunteers. Ten mink were caught and dispatched during 2025 in the Findhorn, Nairn and Lossie area, nine on the Nairn and one on the Lossie. Any sightings of a mink or mink tracks should be reported to Elise on **07880 971890**, or elisecox@fnlirt.org.uk.

Catchment Developments and River Works

2025 has been busy for catchment developments and river works, with a slew of planning applications for wind farms in the upper catchment, and extensive in-channel engineering as part of the A9 Tomatin to Moy dualling works. Additionally, comments were submitted regarding a chicken farm planning application in the Kinloss Burn catchment, and drainage upgrades to the A96 bridge. The Moray FLOW Park proposal to store floating turbine bases in the in-shore area across the mouth of the River Findhorn continues to be closely monitored.

Wind Farms

Comments were submitted on behalf of the Board on 5 planning applications for onshore wind farms in the upper catchment. The Board submitted objections to these based on a number of factors. All of these proposed wind farms were sited on significant areas of peatland, which plays an important role in regulating flows in upland areas. As well as the large amount of peat which is excavated to install the concrete turbine bases, extensive new access tracks are required. Each wind farm requires the excavation of hundreds of thousands of tons of peat.

The applications also underplayed the importance of effects on fish populations downstream, and the cumulative impacts on hydrology of the multiple wind farms currently in planning. There are currently 97 turbines operating in the Findhorn catchment, with 73 more consented, and upwards of 100 turbines now in the application/preapplication phases, depending on final designs.

Should all of these farms be consented and built, there would likely be negative effects on the hydrology of the catchment at a time when there is already strain placed on endangered fish populations by the rapidly changing climate.

A9 Tomatin to Moy Road Dualling Works

Major roadworks have begun to dual the A9 between Tomatin and Moy, linking sections which have already been dualled. The designs for these works have long been established, with approval granted by SEPA for the water crossings in 2021. Balfour Beatty was appointed as the construction contractor, with work starting in 2025.

The most significant works for fish are the diversions of watercourses to allow for extensions to the water crossings for the wider carriageway. This requires dewatering the burn by damming and overpumping. Before this is carried out, a fish rescue is undertaken to remove as many fish as possible from the area which is to be dewatered. The FNLRT was contracted by Balfour Beatty to provide fish rescues throughout the 2025 season, and Trust and Board staff carried out 15 fish rescues on the project. Some spanned multiple days of fishing and involved multiple teams.

In addition to this, Trust and Board staff attended site regularly to check that appropriate mitigations were in place to limit impacts on fish. A disappointing number of issues were identified, and these were raised with Balfour Beatty's environmental team, and SEPA where appropriate.

In August, the Environmental Manager for the site contacted the FNLRT Ecologist to report a fish kill on the Dalmagarry Burn. Board staff were able to attend alongside SEPA, and recorded 183 dead fish, including 175 juvenile salmon. This incident is still under investigation by SEPA over 9 months later, despite the events leading to the fish kill being well understood. This demonstrates the inadequacy of the current regulatory system in addressing environmental damage and deterring poor practices.

In early October, circa 700m of the Dalmagarry Burn was diverted into a new channel, to allow a shorter bridge to be constructed. The work had been scheduled to be completed by September, in line with the license for the in-river works, however poor planning by the developer meant that the work overran. This demonstrates the risks in scheduling major works for the end of the licensed working season.

The diversion was carried out in 2 sections, and the fish rescues transferred 2235 fish out of the area, including 1093 salmon fry and parr. Shortly after the new channel was opened, the substrate which had been placed through the temporary culverts upstream of the diversion washed out in a spate. This left a section of the channel with a bare concrete or plastic base, at a steep angle, and with the flow spread over a wide, shallow area, shortly before spawning. SEPA staff observed trout attempting and failing to swim up the culvert apron on the 6th of October.

Baffles were installed by Balfour Beatty on 11th of November to ease fish passage over the obstruction. This is already into the spawning season, so if fish managed to ascend and spawn upstream, they were likely delayed. The baffles weren't built to the designed specifications, and SEPA and Trust staff have spent significant time advising on improvements to the baffles, but it has often taken a long time for these works to be carried out. Electrofishing at the established site above the obstruction is planned for 2026 to assess the effects on spawning success.

A request was made for out of season works on a crossing further up the Dalmagarry Burn. SEPA consulted with the Board and the request was denied, since it would have had a significant impact on spawning salmon. Good relationships have been established between the FNLRT Ecologist as representative of the

Board and local SEPA staff, which is helpful in ensuring local knowledge on fish populations is incorporated into decision making, and information and observations are shared.

The works at the A9 are scheduled to continue until spring 2028 and will continue to be monitored closely, due to the challenges with environmental management at the site. The FNLRT Ecologist continues to attend monthly meetings and site visits for environmental stakeholders on behalf of the Trust and Board and undertake additional visits when relevant.

Moray FLOW Park

The Moray FLOW Park proposal involves temporary storage of floating wind turbine bases on moorings off the coast until they can be transported offshore in the summer. This has caused local concern for a number of reasons. One of the main concerns from a fisheries perspective is the potential for the increased structure to lead to aggregations of fish predators. The proposed site spans the mouth of the river Findhorn and sits in the path of migrating smolts and returning adults from a number of rivers. As well as the usual predators such as seals and fish-eating birds, there are increasing reports of Sea Bass caught on the Moray coast. These are known to congregate around structures in the water and would be quite capable of preying on smolts. The development has been required by the Marine Directorate to complete an Environmental Impact Assessment, and representation will be submitted on behalf of the Board when consultations open.

Chicken Farms

Moray Council approved the construction of an industrial poultry unit on a farm in the Kinloss burn catchment. Comments were submitted due to the potential impacts of free-range egg units on water quality. As well as the risk of direct runoff from range areas, there are risks of runoff from fields if the production of large quantities of manure leads to over-application.

It is likely that the coming years will see more applications as the demand for free range eggs soars. This trend has been seen in other catchments such as the Nairn and Deveron, and a coordinated effort, supported by Fisheries Management Scotland, is starting to look for the best ways to ensure these developments don't lead to unfortunate issues on Scottish rivers similar to those that have been experienced in England and Wales.

Beauly to Peterhead Overhead Line

Comments were submitted on the planned SSEN Transmission Beauly to Peterhead 400kV power line. Due to extensive use of existing crossings, impacts on the Findhorn are expected to be limited, but if culverts lead to barriers to fish passage it is very hard to address afterwards, so any work would be monitored for good practices around watercourses.

A96 Bridge Drainage

Planning permission was granted for drainage upgrades on the A96 bridge over the Findhorn at Forres. Clarification was sought about the nature of the work, and reassurance was given that the works will in fact reduce the risk of road runoff entering the river.

RIVER WORKS GUIDANCE

All developers undertaking river works, should contact their local planning authority, SEPA, NatureScot and the Fishery Board for advice and guidance.

To provide protection for salmon, sea trout, and other fish the recommended operational period for works is from 1st June to 30th September.

Fish Disease

This year was a challenging one for fish disease, with a severe outbreak of saprolegnia. This pathogen occurs naturally within the river and historically acted as a secondary pathogen on already weak or diseased fish. This would mostly affect fish close to spawning time or kelts, which were exhausted from their long migration and spawning. This wouldn't prevent many fish from spawning, so would have only a limited impact on the population.

In recent years however, outbreaks have been reported in the spring, largely coinciding with warm dry weather and sustained low river levels. These have caused widespread mortality of spring fish, long before

they have an opportunity to spawn. This pattern is of great concern for the health of the salmon population in the River Findhorn.

Reports of dead and diseased salmon began in April, with numbers increasing during May, both from the public, and FNLRT and Board staff. By mid-May there were thought to be few non-infected fish in the river. During this period the previously mentioned recommendation to cease angling was put into place. With a rise in water levels the number of cases diminished, and fresh fish entered the system. Cases were recorded sporadically throughout the summer, with a small spike in cases again in October. This is to be expected and is in line with the season in which saprolegnia infection has taken place historically.

To try to understand the reasons behind this change in infection patterns, a PhD student at the University of Aberdeen, Billy Kyparissis, has been investigating saprolegnia since 2024. This work is funded and supported by many Boards and Trusts, including the Findhorn DSFB. The initial focus of the work has been on the genetics of the disease.



A Salmon with severe saprolegnia on the River Divie at the height of the outbreak in May 2025

Results have shown that one particular strain of the species *Saprolegnia parasitica* is the most significant infective agent of salmon. Samples from infected fish were very closely related, suggesting a recent spread between rivers in Scotland. There is also evidence of rapid evolution for increased infectivity. In light of this, **strict adherence to biosecurity protocols when moving between river catchments is essential**. This is good practice in any case, as many harmful pathogens and invasive non-native species can be transferred between rivers by unwitting river users.

Additional work has begun as part of the PhD to investigate the environmental factors which increase the risk of saprolegnia outbreaks. Water temperatures during saprolegnia outbreaks in the spring are well below those in late summer, but it is theorized that high daily oscillations in temperature may be a contributing factor to outbreaks. The FNLRT has been gathering and providing temperature data to assist with this. Climate change is likely to lead to more dry warm springs and reduced winter snowfall. This will

continue to change the hydrological and temperature conditions, and may increase the likelihood of saprolegnia infection.

Many thanks to all those who have reported diseased fish. This is a great help, and continued vigilance and adherence to biosecurity guidance is much appreciated.

Reporting Diseased Fish

If you suspect a salmon or trout you have caught or found is infected or appears to be in poor health, please:-

- If facilities exist, keep the fish alive (keep net etc)
- If not store the fish in a cool place, if possible on ice, but do not freeze the fish.
- Note location and time and any observations on behaviour.
- Collect scales, length, weight.
- Photograph each side of the fish and the underside.
- Thoroughly disinfect anything which has touched the diseased fish.

Contact:

Ollie Smaje (FNLRT): 07887 535986

Sean Mclean (Head Bailiff) 07920 483081

or

Use the Fisheries Management Scotland App

<https://fms.scot/fish-health-and-disease/>

Pollution Incidents

Thankfully, no pollution incidents were reported during 2025.

POLLUTION INCIDENTS

Should be reported to SEPA through the Pollution Hotline

0800 80 70 60

Education and Publicity

Trust and Board staff carried out the final stage of the 'Schools go to Fish' program with Alves, Mosstowie, and Dallas primary schools. A classroom visit and fly-casting lesson was given at each school, followed by a trip to Kellas Trout Fishery. The classes took turns fishing and identifying invertebrates. Many children



A school fishing trip at Kellas

caught fish, and they clearly enjoyed themselves. The trips were well received and have hopefully opened the eyes of another generations to the joy of angling, and the wonder of the wild fish in our rivers.

The fishing trips were made possible by support from anglers who kindly volunteered their time. Thanks also goes to Kellas estate who offered a discounted rate for the trips.

Acknowledgements

The Board and Trust are extremely grateful for the continuing support of the proprietors and anglers throughout 2025. Thanks to Pieter van West and Billy Kyparissis for their continued work on saprolegnia. We are also grateful for the support of Fisheries Management Scotland, Scottish Fisheries Co-ordination Centre, and Scottish Environmental Protection Agency.