

18th August 2021

Dear Sir/ Madam,

I would like to strongly voice my opposition to any designation of waters to be managed primarily for the benefit of wild salmonid species if this designation includes the "culling" or "removal" of pike or other species from these designated waters. I would like to state that I am primarily a trout angler and would in no way like to see the trout numbers threatened but also enjoy the sport of Pike fishing in the large Loughs as I feel these west of Ireland lakes, if managed correctly, could, not only provide some of the best trout angling in the country, but also some of the best Pike angling with pike over 40lbs a possibility. I have fished three of the lakes listed extensively over the years Lough Corrib, Mask and Carra but I am going to concentrate primarily on Lough Carra, as I grew up beside this lake, have fished it regularly for over 30 years and feel that I am well qualified to give a fair, unbiased opinion on the issue of stock management in the lakes.

- **Pike have been now scientifically proven to be a native species having arrived in Ireland over 8000 years ago:**

It has now been scientifically proven that pike have been native to our shores for thousands of years. You need only to look at a pike in the water to see how well camouflaged they are and how much of a prehistoric, fascinating creature the pike really is. If pike and trout and all the other species that make up the fascinating underwater world have survived together for thousands of years why do some anglers believe think they are suddenly responsible for killing all the trout. It simply does not make any sense. An eco-system needs its top predator to survive successfully. It is probably the most important member in any eco-system. Yes, pike eat trout. They also eat other pike, perch, water fowl etc. Large trout also eat smaller trout. Does this mean that we should consider removing them also? I don't think so. Even if the theory from some anti-pike warriors was hypothetically correct that old "esox Lucius" or "foreign fish" as they like to call them were introduced by the "English" to Irish waters some 400 years ago would they not have killed all the trout within the first 350 years before the fisheries started casting their gill nets across our beautiful lakes. No! because they have co-existed for all that time and nature and evolution has a natural balance. In my opinion, removing pike will do more harm than good to the trout stocks in the medium to long term and will only serve to satisfy a few for the sake of a handful of political votes.

- **Removing pike is actually an impossible task:**

Lough Corrib is a lake of 44,000 acres and Lough Mask over 20,000. When you take the depths of these lakes, up to 200ft in places, inaccessible areas, and the sheer size of them it is clear that any effort to remove pike from these lakes would be an impossible task. You might as well try to remove all the sand from the Sahara Desert. It will be a waste of fisheries resources and will just target a few areas where pike fishing is probably good at the moment. It will be quite easy to remove large pike as they are easily caught by electrofishing and gill nets. Other, smaller pike will just re-colonise this area over the coming years meaning that the pike fishing in will be adversely affected in the medium term and there will be no benefit to trout stocks. A number of years ago, myself and some childhood friends used to cycle to the Cloon River in Partry to go pike fishing with some decent pike to be got. The river was then electro fished with the large-scale removal of pike. What happened following this was a disaster as for quite a few years after we were catching huge

numbers of juvenile or "pencil pike" as we called them and could not get any decent pike. The balance had been upset and huge numbers of small pike were surviving in the absence of large hens. This was certainly no addition to trout stocks.

Lough Carra is slightly different to Mask and Corrib. It is a much smaller, shallower lake and I feel that large scale removal of Pike could have a detrimental effect of the natural balance of the lake. The average size of fish including Trout, Pike and Perch is much larger on Carra when compared with Conn, Corrib or Mask. I don't know the scientific reason for this, but it has been commented on to me by many visiting anglers. The Pike fishing on Carra is currently quite good while the trout fishing also remains excellent in my opinion. In one day in May this year 3 boats with myself and some fellow anglers landed 13 trout over 13 inches with the average size being 17 inches with one fish of 21 inches. This was exceptional fishing and would compare favourably with any fishing trip on the lake since I started fishing over 30 years ago. I might add that most of the trout were returned to the water as we have a rule of only one trout per boat per day and never keep a trout over 2 lbs in weight.

Finally, Lough Ree and lakes in the midlands have been managed as mixed fisheries in recent years with no forced removal of pike. Lough Ree remains a top-class trout fishery while also remaining an excellent coarse and pike fishery. Enough said.

- **Pike Fishing would add huge benefit to tourism and the west of Ireland hospitality sector:**

The brown trout season in Ireland is quite short and patchy. Huge numbers visit the Corrib for the famous mayfly hatch which still provides brilliant fishing. The World Cup on Lough Mask, European Cup and other completions are very good for the local economy. However, during the summer lull in the trout fishing and from the 30th of September onwards the piers are quiet, the sound of outboards on the lakes cease and the lakes effectively close up for the winter. With the right marketing and local interest, we could have holiday makers, day trippers and locals on our beautiful lakes 12 months of the year. The angling shops would be bustling, the pubs, restaurants, hotels, boat hire etc would all see a huge boost and towns on the shores of our great lakes like Ballinrobe, Castlebar, Headford and Clonbur would have much needed footfall.

Just up the road in Boyle, Co. Roscommon there is a 2-day pike competition every spring fished on Lough Key that attracts hundreds of visitors from near and far. The town is bustling for the weekend with local volunteers, sponsors and businesses all getting involved and the atmosphere around the town and the lake is electric for the weekend with tens of thousands of euros being spent in the town at a quiet time in the tourist season. All pike caught are measured, weighed and returned alive to the water.

Imagine a similar festival on Carra or Mask in October or November. It could be a huge asset to our local towns and would showcase the area to huge audience.

- **Pike Fishing is an excellent way to introduce children to fishing:**

We all know at this stage that the demographic of anglers is getting older. It is nearly as hard to find an angler under 40 as a priest under 40 these days. It is difficult for young anglers to get into fishing nowadays, unless a father, mother or family member is involved. Fly fishing,

albeit the purest form and most satisfying type of fishing can take a while to master and is not easy for children. It is also a relatively expensive hobby. Like many others, I started off pike fishing. It is easier to master, and they are generally easier to catch than trout. For myself and many other anglers that I know we progressed from spinning for pike to spinning for trout and then master the art (or try to master the art in my case) of fly fishing. If you can get a child into pike fishing at a young age they may grow an interest in the lake and fishing and be hooked for life to all types of fishing. No child minds if it is a pike or a trout on the end of the line. It is just the fun of catching a fish. Different organisations and groups squabbling about pike and trout does nothing to introduce youth to fishing.

I had my 5 year old boy fishing on corrib last year and we caught a nice pike followed by a trout. We then pulled in for a snack at an island and found dead pike thrown on the island. This put a bad taste in both of our mouths and I struggled to explain why someone would do such a thing. This is the type of behaviour that will ensure our beautiful lakes will not be fished into the future.

- **Gill Netting and Electrofishing are downright cruel:**

The placing of gillnets across our lakes in winter is an outdated, cruel and unnecessary practise. Fish get caught up in these nets and may die slow painful deaths being trapped in the nets for days. This would hardly go along with Minister Ryan's green ethos, would it? Bycatch will undoubtedly get caught in these nets and may succumb to them including trout, swans, ducks etc. There is also anecdotal evidence that on some waters large pike over 85cm that were supposed to be returned to the water alive after capture were sometimes being removed with the smaller pike.

Electrofishing, while it is a cleaner practise may have an even more negative effect on pike as large hens are more susceptible to the electric current meaning that the genetically superior pike may be removed from the water while some of the smaller pike will remain. This, again will not improve trout stocks on the lake.

- **Culling or Rehoming:**

There was a bit of spin in recent years when fisheries were removing large pike from the designated lakes and placing them in smaller, landlocked "pike" lakes. While I welcome the fact that the pike were not being culled and fisheries officers handled them, kept them alive and rehomed them with the utmost care I feel that this practise might be dangerous. These smaller lakes probably have a distinct type of pike that may not grow as large as our large limestone lake pike from Carra, Mask or Corrib. Introducing large numbers of new fish to those lakes may affect their natural balance of such a small water and when it comes to spawning it is unclear if the large introduced hens know where to go. They may have distinct homing behaviour similar to salmon and try in vain to return to the water where they were born. I have no evidence of this it is just my opinion.

Possible Solutions to the ongoing battle:

- **Surveying/ gps tagging of fish:**

In my opinion, a ten-year cycle should be introduced starting immediately. You need a decent amount of time to properly study fish numbers etc. from year to year. Pike, Trout and other species should be surveyed and counted every year to keep a handle on numbers present/ average sizes etc. The practice of gps tagging and following the progress of large hens and also mature trout may give some insight into the annual patterns, diet, growth rate etc.

You would be able to find out if the pike specifically target spawning streams, different areas of the lake at different times and have good information on trout numbers per year. If there was satisfactory proof that the trout numbers were remaining steady towards the end of this period it might finally put the argument to bed, and we could all move on.

- **Lowering the bag limit of trout:**

The bag limit of trout should be reduced in my opinion to one trout per angler per day. Also, an upper limit should be introduced of 16 inches or thereabouts. This ensures that large female trout with the largest amount of eggs continue to spawn once they reach maturity. Also, some of our largescale trout competitions should begin to practice catch and release. With all the modern technology this should now be quite easily feasible and has been practised in pike competitions for years.

- **Continued enhancement of spawning streams and preserving of lands adjacent to rivers and streams:**

There is great work ongoing in relation to trout spawning streams and the planned preservation of lands adjacent to all notable spawning streams. This work will aid spawning trout and should ensure a healthy population into the future. The OPW should liaise with fisheries groups before any drainage/ flood relief works are carried out on important trout spawning streams.

- **Eradication of Mink:**

A combined effort between fisheries, opw, angling clubs, shooting clubs etc should once and for all come together and remove this introduced pest from our waterways. Fish life and bird life has been decimated for years by this creature and it is time major resources were employed to exterminate them from the irish countryside. Unlike Pike, the mink are an introduced species and have a major negative effect on local biodiversity.

Summary:

To summarise, I would just like to state that I hope all voices are listened to in the submissions of the "Designated Salmonid waters Bye-Law" and the authorities should not be bullied into any decision making process to serve the misguided opinions of a few to the detriment of us all, primarily the fish, who often get forgotten about in these arguments. Any decisions made should be based on Scientific research and findings only, not political pressure.

"mura bhfuil sé briste ná déan é a shocrú"

Kind Regards



[REDACTED]