

This update summarises key work task progress since the last update 28 February 2025. The main tasks of the last three months have been to: carry out smolt trapping to improve capture efficiency at the Erchless site for future smolt studies, commence engagement around the potential sediment management projects (Orrin visit), drone survey the R. Farrar and apply for funding for hydro-morph consultant advice, finalise the updated FMP (now on website), write the Efish report, set the ghillies up for the adult sampling project, annual report prep, and skunk cabbage control. Electro-fishing preparation is about to commence. We await the start of Chris Conroy as SSE's fishery advisor in mid-June so that we can engage on smolt project design and sediment management. The seal licence outcome has been delayed by NatureScot.

## 1. Governance/ organisation

**Policy docs:** Update required on progress of 'DRAFT Staff, Volunteer and Board member manual V1' review **Action: HH-** outstanding.

**Annual report:** Contribution submitted to HH 27 May

### Facilities:

- RW's laptop went pop 17 March, this forced the transfer over to the newer laptop originally purchased for Ant.
- Canoe paddles purchased secondhand for INNS and Seal deterrent work.
- RW's phone contract ended in January and AS and RP have issues with their mobiles. **Action HH** to get new contract-outstanding.
- Petty cash card required for staff **Action: HH** -outstanding

### H+S:

- RP due to attend first aid training in June.
- RW, AS and RP due to attend and pass tests on Safety on Construction site training to get CSCS operative green cards for contract work this summer. **Action HH:** Pay for training, **Action AS+RP** set up accounts on CITB website.
- Electro-fishing kit serviced by GROaqua
- Site RA complete for Erchless smolt trapping site

### Budget/ finance:

- Contract work accepted re Beaully- Peterhead OHL on behalf of rskbiocensus (for BAM nuttall/ SSEN) this summer. Habitat surveys, efish and FWPM surveys with report required.
- Pink salmon eDNA water sampling now unfunded.
- Recent data request recently received from AECOM.
- Invoices sent to ERM and WSP 5 March. **Action HH** to chase.
- SISI claim submitted 5 March
- NatureScot will fund more general monitoring in relation to beaver releases, not specific to Beaully.

**Vehicles:** Van needs roof rack and hybrid tyres **Action HH** outstanding. RW to help.

**FMS:** See [The Sway](#) newsletter for a summary of FMS activities. Attended FMS member's meeting and conference 20 + 21<sup>st</sup> March. A link to the presentations are available in the Sway newsletter. FMS recently provided us with advice regarding funding opportunities.

**NBFT:** Meeting 19 May with Neil, Brian and trustees. General feeling that a revamp to NBFT to NBRiversTrust (with broader biodiversity remit than current) would be a good idea, but will explore further on **26<sup>th</sup> June at meeting (Lovat arms) 2pm**. Have made a list of relevant actions in our FMP that would be relevant to NBFT if a revamp goes ahead.

**Training:** All staff to complete construction site safety training, RW to do A2C of C training this year, to increase drone competence. Reece to attend basic efish course in June **Action: RW +RP+AS**

**Future:** Initial discussions between FMS, NatureScot and SSE community fund are underway to see if there will be a funded traineeship scheme next year. Order 3x signage for Lovat bridge turn off so folk can find the office.

## 2. Work Plan Progress to address the Pressures (\*=priority)

**Fishery Management Plan:** Both the [pdf](#) and [Storyboard](#) versions of the FMP are on the website, updated with board suggestions made at the last meeting.

**\*Bailiffing:** See AS' quarterly report.

**\*Sediment management:** We hope to improve the resilience of the salmon population on the Rivers Farrar and Beaully below the dams by restoring salmon spawning beds.

Itemised quote received from Kaya consulting for project site selection and methodology including FWPM survey. Cheaper than CBEC and should provide the information at a suitable standard for SEPA and ourselves. Envirocentre did not provide a quote.

**Grant application to SSE Community fund submitted 29 May for £31,000** included KAYA quote, FWPM surveys (which we may carry out if successful in securing a licence from NatureScot), Mavic 3 Enterprise drone and a GoPRO. Should hear in September whether successful or not.

Engagement for gravel augmentation projects below the dams has commenced with the **board visit to the Orrin site on May 20**. Attended by Alastair, Frank, Alec (Bidwells), Chris Daphne (Ness). Thanks to Sunny Bradbury (Cromarty Firth board Fishery Manager) for hosting. A good opportunity to discuss ideas. We now have a couple of sites in mind that would lend themselves practically to gravel augmentation on the Farrar and Beaully. Lovat estate would be happy for this work to go ahead too. Expert advice required from consultant due to the number of time-share anglers on LBFS, so communication and sound execution of gravel augmentation essential. SSE are due to feedback on the two Hydro-morphology reports once Chris Conroy starts. Reports will ideally need updating based on feedback, but a visit with SEPA with/ without SSE will move things on.

RW visited Kyle of Sutherland's habitat restoration project on 13 March with West Sutherland Fisheries. The addition of gravel to 4 sites on the R. Shin below Shin dam has been successful with salmon using the new spawning beds. Large woody debris/ rock islands have improved the heterogeneity of the river bed and have provided increased options for adult fish lies as well as good sorting of substrate for the various life stages of salmon.

**\*Smolt passage:**

- Informal visit to Aigas dam after reports of smolts above dams 1 May.
- Smolt protocol for 2025 was thoroughly updated in November, still awaiting draft from Naveed- an oversight. Action RW to chase.
- See 'Incidents'

**\*Predation:** The [seal licence application](#) with [supporting info](#) was submitted on 30 January we are waiting to hear whether we will be granted a seal management licence (applicable from January 2026). There has been a delay in MD's decision due to NatureScot.

- Low water has meant limited specialist seal ingress to the river (5 March, 13 March, 18 April).
- Seal licence review comments submitted to Marine Directorate 5 March.
- Bird licence Supporting information drafted, awaiting ghillie observations and update on activities before sending licence return and licence application to NatureScot before end of June.

**Invasives (INNS)/ Scottish Invasive Species Initiative (SISI):**

- The current SISI project will come to an end in March 2026. If developments are given the go-ahead, Ossian windfarm developer are keen to take on the project with more of a mink focus for 30yrs. Future staffing structure has been drafted by Callum the current project manager. Currently this would include payment of 30% of staff wage to cover overheads to hosting organisations (with no line management responsibility). The current drafted format presents an opportunity to secure long-term funding for the board, although NBFT may be the more suitable hosting organisation. Overall, board members have expressed support for hosting staff in the future. Ness board have also expressed an interest in hosting several staff and securing bigger office accommodation. **Any further thoughts on this?**
- AMW partnership successfully submitted a tender to carry out the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of JK control Beaully- Estuary Aug-Sep. This will be funded by SISI at a cost of £2,106.
- Treated Skunk cabbage at Ferry point, Ferry field, Wester Lovat (by boat with volunteer Basher). Trudi treated Mauld, Toumaine, Kirkton burn, Carnoch, Teanassie...
- Trudi showed RW the new mink trap locations. We now have very good coverage of the catchment including coastal areas. A mink was caught on Beaufort estate 3 June!

**Pink salmon:** It is a Pink salmon year so please be vigilant and report any sightings [here](#). Licence granted to enable removal and humane dispatch of pink salmon, please dispatch humanely if caught. General info [here](#). We may be taking water samples for eDNA analysis for an FMS project.

**Development/ consultations:**

- Responded to [Beaully BESS consultation](#) 12 March- assessment of R. Beaully fish/ biodiversity not made, too close to river.
- Fanellan substation development with Black bridge upgrade 2 May- **We were not consulted!!** Thanks to Charlie and Eugenie for collating a last-minute response!!
- Highland Biodiversity Action plan update 28 March.
- [Fasnakyle-Bingally connection](#) 1 May.

**Hydro:** There has been increased concern for flows in the catchment, predominantly from an angling perspective, especially over the last few years where generation is at the mercy of what's happening at the windfarms. E.g. BAC struggle to fish as the flows are often too high in the summer. Glass Syndicate and LBFS struggle with the yoyo flows. We have recently seen very low spring flows due to a lack of rainfall (widespread across Scotland). In Winter 2024 salmon wanting to spawn temporarily couldn't access areas of spawning substrate opposite Belladrum burn, and also above Cruives. There is concern that a few spawning areas/ eggs are left dry in the spring. There are specific burns where changes to flow could really help fish access e.g. E. Deanie burn.

If we work within the existing water budget we can suggest changes to the CAR licences (i.e. minimum compensation flows). These are currently set higher in the summer than the winter. We could request to make these more aligned with the natural seasonal flows (i.e. lower in the summer, higher in the winter). To do this a review of the CAR licences across the catchment would be required (minimum of Fasnakyle PS and the 3 dams). However juvenile fish densities on the mainstem are looking good at the moment so we might need to leave it for now unless they drop or electro-fishing on Lower Beaully highlights a problem. **What do you think?**

**Angling:** [Conservation Policy](#) updated making even clearer the stipulation for 100% catch and release for both salmon and sea trout. On the website.

**Beavers:** NatureScot are currently carrying out stakeholder engagement to identify mitigation/ licence conditions to alleviate potential problems associated with future beaver release in the catchment. Meeting with NatureScot on 19 May. Raised were the need/ opportunity for riparian restoration especially in areas of high deer numbers, previously highlighted concerns of future damming drying out spawning areas (e.g. R. Cannich), potential fish passage impact for sea trout on small tributaries of Belladrum sub-catchment. The need to assess the bottom of R. Affric as this is key spawning area for Affric fish. See [notes of meeting](#) and [map](#).

**Barriers:** RW received details of previous Lovat estate work to partially de-culvert Bridgend burn. Possible de-culverting of Bridgend burn project through Beaully Community Trust to reduce flooding, and improve sea trout migration and habitat.

**Diffuse Pollution:** Walkovers of Belladrum sub-catchment to assess diffuse pollution sources and identify relevant farms and crofts in need of help are now in the Action plan. Funding may be sought from the Wild Fisheries Fund (for fencing and solar powered pumps).

### 3. Monitoring Methods

**Conservation grading:** Final river gradings for the 2025 season are [here](#). The Beaully is 'Good' (equivalent of Grade 1), however we queried why the % chance of meeting the egg requirement in 2023 had dropped to 62.31% when rod catch above Aigas had actually been quite good. We received an email on 13<sup>th</sup> March clarifying that, "We have not been able to obtain any counter data from SSE for 2023 and this is the main explanation for the differences in the proportion attainment among years. The 2023 data is based on rod catches above the counters while previous years were based on a combination of minimum counts from the partially functioning counter and rod catches. The use of the minimum counts allows any estimates from the rod catch which fall below that value to be excluded from the estimation process. For the same catch this will therefore result in a higher certainty that the egg requirement will be met – so there is more uncertainty around the 2023 level, and a correspondingly lower proportion attainment (as it still contains the low estimates which have been removed in previous years).

*If we are successful in attempts to get data from SSE then this will be used in subsequent years (including re-running 2023 if appropriate)."*

**Smolt monitoring:** The purpose of smolt trapping this year was to improve the capture efficiency of the trap to inform future smolt studies. We only wanted to run the trap for a short period to save staff time.

- Having snorkelled the site to check for under water hazards (large boulders) that could damage the trap, the 6ft trap was delivered by SSE fully complete, and was installed in the river on 17 April under the expert and much appreciated guidance of Jim Braithwaite! Naveed from SSE also helped.
- The trap was run from 21<sup>st</sup> April-1<sup>st</sup> May (10 nights), and after various hitches was in prime position (further away from the bank in the main flow) from 26<sup>th</sup> (5 nights).
- Alcian dye marking of 71 smolts occurred once the trap was in prime position.
- We borrowed a spare smolt release box from the generous Cromarty Fishery Board so fish were fully recovered from handling before re-commencing their migration.
- Sunny and Ed came over from The Cromarty Fishery Board to provide PIT tagging and dye mark training 25 April.
- Sunny lent us his robust inflatable boat- Thank you so much!
- Thanks also to the 5 volunteers who helped check the trap (Anne, Basher, Olivia, John and Lynn).
- LBFS members (Gordon, Paul S, Paul J) visited and were interested in our work.
- **The hitches overcome:** winch fail, staff illness, pole length too short, trap needing 2 staff to raise/ lower drum rather than just 1, boat access required, pole digging into bank.
- **The hitch not overcome:** The trap had been put together incorrectly by SSE and we couldn't rectify the problem. Eventually the trap started to damage itself so we stopped monitoring before serious damage occurred.
- **The result:** 9% trap efficiency was achieved at low flows (a large improvement to the <1% last year). We have ascertained a trap position that will be suitable for future smolt studies in relation to smolt survival and behaviour in relation to Aigas and Kilmorack dams. So success, although it didn't feel like it at the time.
- **Next time:** We will put the trap together ourselves. We would need a boat to carry out the trapping (we are hoping to inherit SEPA Dingwall's X survey boat 'HMS Lobelia'. This would be useful as it is easily transported and could take an outboard which would be useful for other work too. We should make 2 smolt release boxes (one for above and one for below the trapping site using old mink rafts).

#### **Fish Counts:**

- Processing of last year's fish counts should occur once Chris Conroy is in post. No update received on when we should expect to receive fish counts for this year. Bigger AI hard drives installed at Aigas and Kilmorack 17 Feb. The Mark14s are in place at Beannacharan (no AI planned for 2025).

#### **Electro-fishing:**

- The Marine Directorate electrofishing report is just out in an embargoed form (please do not share out-with the board). Makes very interesting reading. Beaully is one of only 4 rivers (out of 27) that has had consistently good salmon fry and parr densities since 2018. We had the highest average density of parr compared to the rest of Scotland and second highest fry density. This means that the Beaully catchment "is likely to be healthy with a reasonable degree of confidence" and adult return numbers have not dropped off enough to see an impact on juvenile densities yet. Trout appear to be faring terribly across Scotland. See [Appendix](#) for more information.
- Electro-fishing report including 2023 and 2024 surveys is due. Benchmark data was made available ahead of publication by Marine Directorate Science to enable analysis. **Action RW** to finish report.

- Focus will be on delivering the RSKbiocensus contract (Lower Beaully, Moniack and coastal burns south side of firth). Hoping to survey the mainstem R. Beaully with volunteers/ a paid contractor (1 day a week) as very little data and will support sediment management work. Also E Deanie burn in relation to Farrar Vista project.
- If time additionally: Moniack burn and Bruaich burn (in relation to beaver re-introduction). R. Cannich in relation to potential weir removal. Allt Coillte and lower R. Cannich in relation to beaver damming. Tarradale burn to see if used by sea trout. A few Glass mainstem sites to enable comparison with Farrar to assess potential hydro impacts.
- *Future*: Breackachy (Ballach/Erchless windfarm). AURIS site re-visit?
- 2019 NEPs data has not been entered into SFCC database and 2023 data needs correcting. This is will be a time consuming process.

#### **Predation monitoring:**

**Seals:** Reporting of specialist seal presence continues in the [FMS reporting app](#).

**Sawbills:** The third bird survey to support the bird licence application occurred on 31 March (Farrar) and 1 April (Glass and Beaully-AS).

**Drone:** Farrar drone baseline survey (dam-confluence) completed 19 March with vol Steve. Redds and substrate visible. Videos of Beaully and Farrar processed by Sean (FMS) through WebODM software but not good enough quality to map. Good as trial flight. Aiming to survey and produce mappable output of both rivers below the dams as a baseline in January 2026. Have included cost of Mavic 3 enterprise drone required for this work in SSE funding application, could otherwise borrow Chris D and his drone to do the work from the Ness (see below).

**National adult Sampling:** LBFS Ghilies set up by RW to deliver this project 28 May.

#### **People: Community engagement, participation and heritage**

**Oral History Project:** Printing request sent to Highland printers. **Action RW** to amend borders before printing possible.

**Website:** Updated with Fishery Management Plan, Storyboard format and Senior Biologist update Feb 2025.

#### **Social media:**

- Orrin site visit, Patrols (AS), Smolt monitoring updates, general work update, burn clearing AS.

#### **Proprietors:**

- Emailed out asking for specific locations of concern in relation to beaver re-introduction ahead of NatureScot beaver meeting (19 May).
- Meetings at river with Paul S (LBFS) and Paul Jarman (LBFS chairman) at Falls, Erchless, and by phone. Chat with Gavin H (LBFS) concerned about smolts.

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**Incidents:** Near miss Fri 23 May: Due to water scarcity SSE did not have much water to generate with so generation has been low during the smolt run. 500+ smolts were stuck at Aigas gate slots on Fri 23 May. This was of concern as 250 is average for peak numbers, and 500 occurred last year when there was an outage of the G1 turbine. SEPA were informed and preliminary preparations were made for a possible smolt rescue by BFB. SSE planned to use up stored water for generation to draw smolts out of the slots. Luckily rain fell that evening and high generation on Friday and Saturday nights resulted in there being just 34 smolts at Aigas, and 46 at Kilmorack on Monday 26 May. We were due to visit the dams the week of 26<sup>th</sup> May, however a lack of planning by SSE meant this did not occur. The following week there was work going on at the dams resulting in no access for us. This is likely down to understaffing at SSE. Perhaps with Chris C starting we have a clean slate, but if access continues to be an issue, we would suggest limited access be granted to Ali to access the dams during future smolt runs. A chat with Ness and Conon to see what level of comms/ mitigation is in place would be good so we are all consistent with our requests. **Action RW**.

7-8 June: A few fish lifts missed over the weekend at Beannacharan due to a rotork issue, manual lifts conducted, fixed night of 9<sup>th</sup>.

**Written Outputs:** DRAFT Efish report, SSE community funding application, Annual report contribution, NBFT draft list of management actions, FMP update, contribution to [Highland Environment Forum](#) update.

**Meetings:** KOS gravel augmentation site visit (13 March), FMS members meeting (20 March), FMS conference (21 March), SISI (25 March), Alan Wells (FMS) and Brian Shaw discussed various issues (1 April), Paul Jarman LBFS (3 April), Sean (FMS) drone (10

April), NBFT (13 May), Paul Sizeland (FMS) funding chat (13 May), NatureScot beaver (19 May), Orrin gravel augmentation visit (20 May).

**20 May Orrin site visit to look at the Cromarty Fishery board's gravel augmentation project**



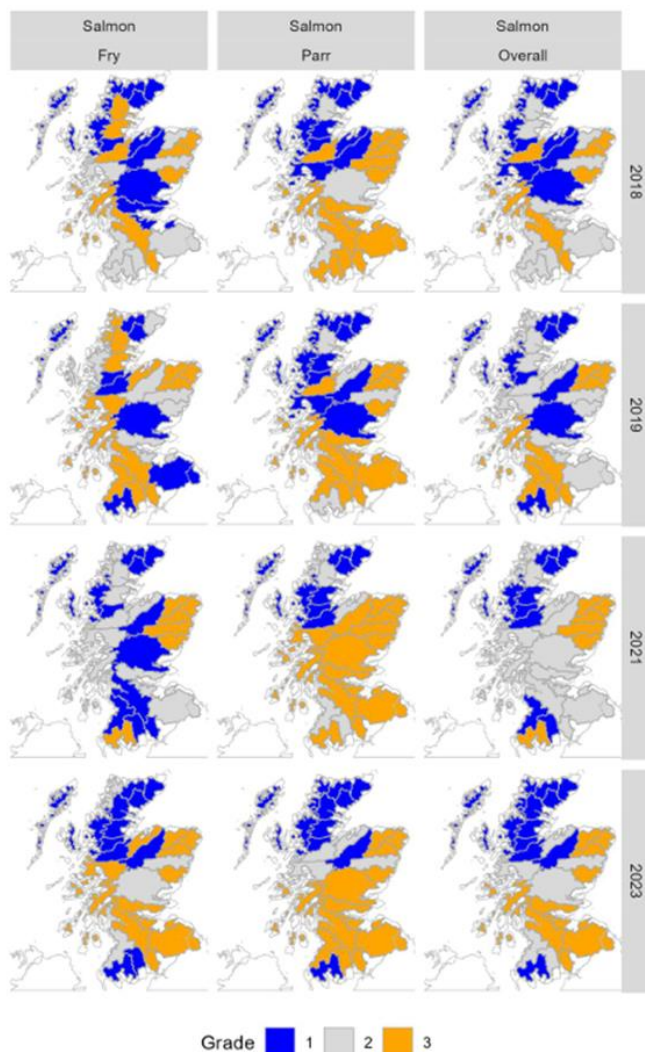


## APPENDIX- NEPS 2023 Electrofishing Report

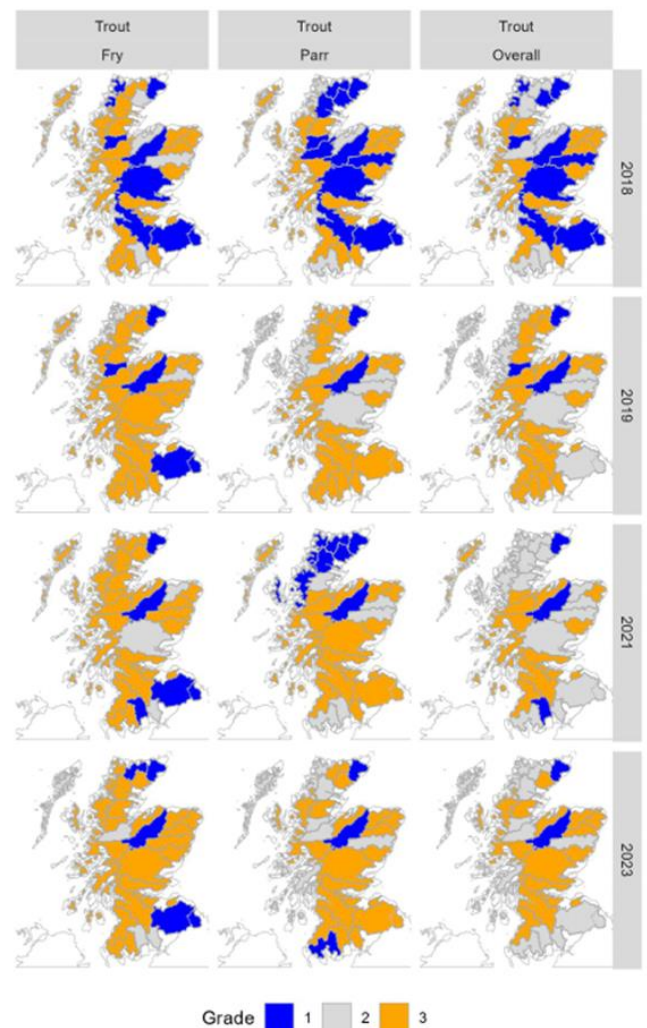
Beaully Fishery Board have access to this report ahead of time in an embargoed format. Please do not share more widely.

**Beaully is one of only 4 rivers (out of 27) that has had consistently good salmon fry and parr densities since 2018.** We had the highest average density of parr compared to the rest of Scotland and second highest fry density. This means that the Beaully catchment “is likely to be healthy with a reasonable degree of confidence” and adult return numbers have not dropped off enough to see an impact on juvenile densities yet. Trout appear to be faring terribly across Scotland.

Below are some selected highlights...



**Figure 19.** Inter-annual variability in the status (Grades) of NEPS regions: salmon fry, parr and overall. Data from NEPS 2021 and 2023 were post-stratified to allow comparison across years with common regions and sample frames.

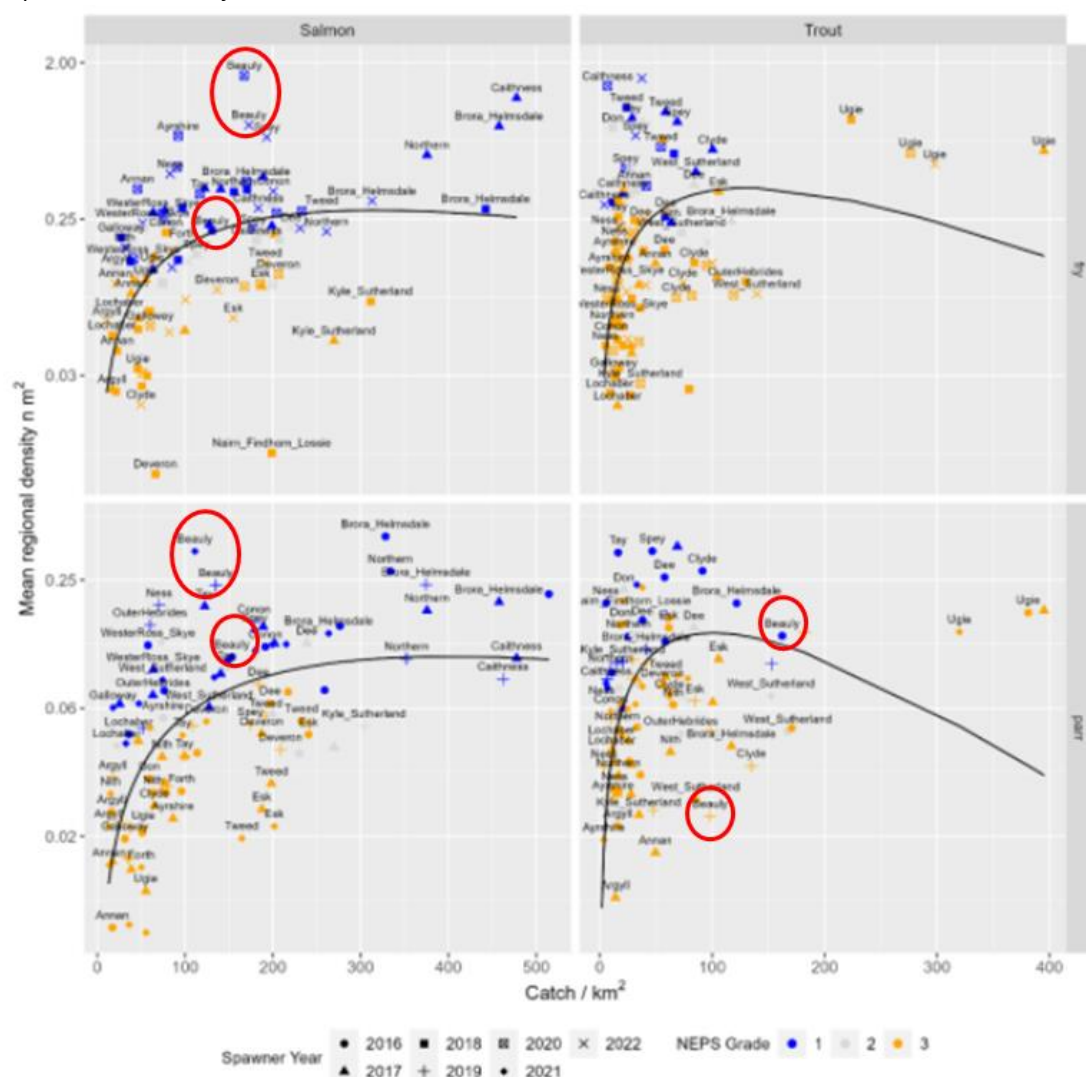


**Figure 20.** Inter-annual variability in the status (Grades) of NEPS regions: trout fry, parr and overall. Data from NEPS 2021 and 2023 were post-stratified to allow comparison across years with common regions and sample frames.

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management objective. Where ova deposition is adequate to ensure freshwater habitats are saturated, juvenile densities should be relatively constant over time, varying only due to density independent processes (e.g. effects of hydroclimatic extremes). Similarly, juvenile densities (recruits) should be independent of adult numbers (stock), as density dependent processes in freshwater would set an upper limit to production (Glover et al., 2020). These characteristics should be indicative of NEPS Grade 1 rivers. In contrast, where juvenile densities decline over time, or vary with adult abundance, this indicates that juvenile populations are below freshwater carrying capacity and are consequently more consistent with NEPS Grades 2 or 3.

This is the first time (?) a stock-recruitment curve has been done for Scotland and indicates the number of adults required to maintain juvenile densities.



**Figure 25.** Relationship between salmon and trout rod catch density (catch / km² of accessible river wetted area) and regional estimates of mean juvenile density (in Strahler order 2-4 rivers). Symbols indicate lagged spawner years assuming parr are predominantly in their second year in river (1+ parr). Colours indicate NEPS Grades. Black lines show a fitted Ricker stock-recruitment relationship.