

Findhorn Fishery Board

Annual Report 2016



Salmon ascending the Findhorn (photo Mark Laing)

Findhorn Fishery Board

Chairman

Alasdair Laing (*Logie Estate*)

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Colin Cawdor (*Cawdor Estate*)

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Robert Laughton (*FNLFT Director*)

Sean Maclean (*Superintendent*)

Billy Forrester (*Bailiff*)

Valerie Wardlaw (*Administrator*)

Clerk

Will Cowie (*R&R Urquhart*)

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Chairman's Report

It was encouraging to see the return to more normal catch levels which was seen in 2015 after the poor catches 2013 and 2014 maintained into 2016 with a salmon and grilse catch of 2207 and the 10 year average creeping over the 2400 mark.

Rod catches are notoriously imprecise measures of the health of the salmon population, being highly dependent on water conditions, angler competence and angler effort but they are the best tool we have at present and, on the Findhorn at least and when coupled to the population surveys done by Bob Laughton and his team, appear to indicate that we need not have too many concerns about the health of the river.

It is worth noting that in 1966 (50 years ago) the average was 777 – in the days, of course, before netting had stopped and when many fewer beats were let – but an interesting comparison, nonetheless.

As the newly introduced measures to assess the conservation status of rivers (the Findhorn is grade 1) are refined we expect to see rod catch data augmented by more scientific measures in assessing river health. We should, however, not forget that there is still much to be concerned about but the evidence is more and more that those concerns should be focused at the river mouth and beyond.

The first fish was caught on the 18th February and good water levels allowed fish to move steadily up stream as temperatures increased. The result was a an average spring run and a good summer run up until August after which poor water levels restricted catches until the end of the season. When the rain returned in October there was good run of fish and a further run of small grilse was observed in November.

Work on control of Invasive Non Native species (animals and plants) continued and we hope to be able to maintain this into 2017.

On the governance front, development of proposals for Wild Fisheries Reform continues. During the year the Association of District Fishery Boards and the Rivers and Fisheries Trust of Scotland agreed to combine their operations under a single banner, Fisheries Management Scotland. They are now well placed to continue to play an active part in representing the interests of fisher owners and managers. Alan Wells, ASFB's previous Director of Policy, has returned from his secondment to Scottish Government as Chief Executive of Fisheries Management Scotland.

Alasdair Laing

Chairman Findhorn Fishery Board

River Findhorn and Fishery 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.

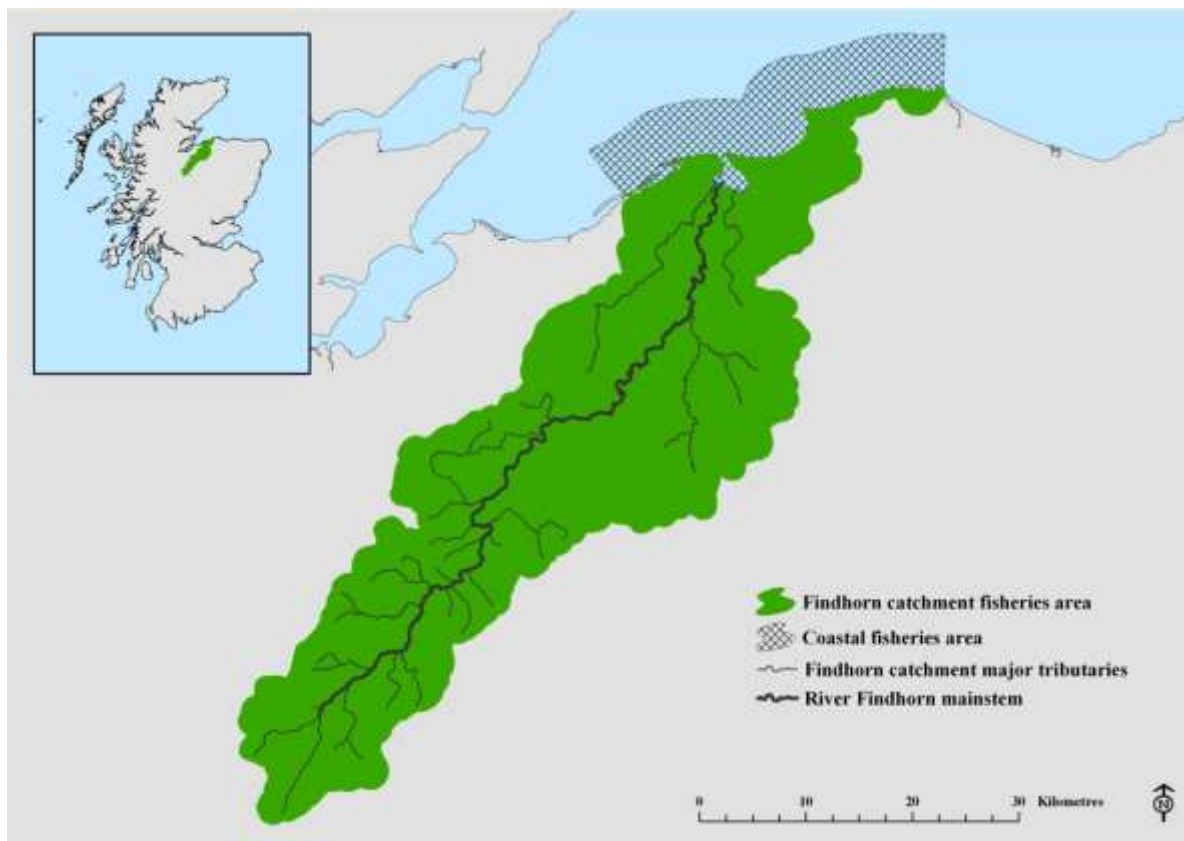


Figure 1: Findhorn catchment and coastal district.

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

<http://www.fnift.org.uk/river-findhorn/>

<http://www.fnift.org.uk/>

<http://www.asfb.org.uk/>

River Findhorn Salmon and Sea Trout Catches 2016

Salmon and sea trout catches are summarised in Figures 2 and 3 and Table 1 below and more detailed beat by beat and seasonal information is provided in Appendix 1.

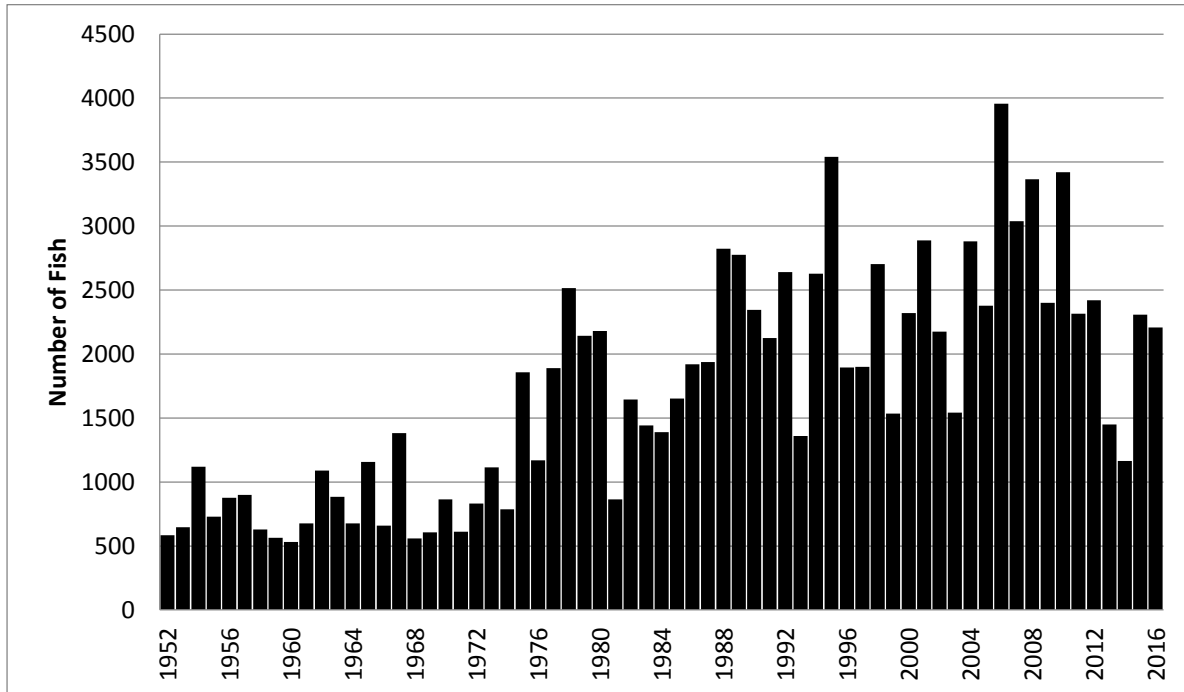


Figure 2: Findhorn salmon and grilse rod catch 1952 to 2016.

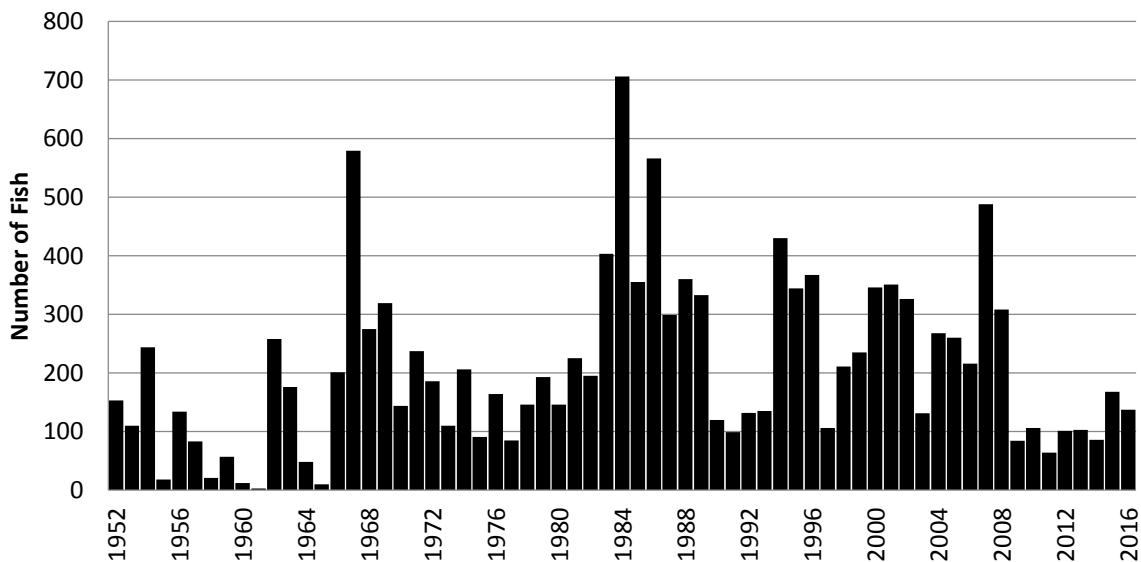


Figure 3: Rod catches for sea trout for River Findhorn from 1952 to 2016.

The salmon and grilse catch for 2016 was 2207 which was similar to 2015, an encouraging improvement on 2013 and 2014 seasons (Figure 2). Sea trout catches (Figure 3) were also similar to 2015 with the catch in 2016 amounting to 137.

Table 1 provides a summary of the spring salmon, summer salmon, grilse and sea trout caught throughout the 2016 Findhorn fishing season. Catch and release rates are encouragingly high with a 99.4% release rate. One spring salmon was reported dead during capture and was mistakenly retained by the angler rather than returned to the river which was contrary to recent legislation. The angler was been advised of the correct procedure. Release rates for summer salmon increased to 88.8% and grilse also increased to 78.3%, Overall catch and release rate for salmon and grilse was 86.5%. Sea trout release rates also improved to 92.0%.

Further details on the trends in catch and release for each salmon component and sea trout from 2000 to 2016 are shown in Appendix 1. The Board are delighted that anglers have continued to adopt a very positive response to the catch and release recommendations and are contributing to safeguarding stocks for the future.

Table 1: Numbers of spring salmon, summer salmon, grilse and sea trout caught and catch and release rates for the River Findhorn, 2016.

	Caught and Released	Caught and Retained	Total	Release Rate (%)
Spring Salmon	166	1	167	99.4
Summer Salmon	1218	153	1371	88.8
Grilse	524	145	669	78.3
Sea Trout	126	11	137	92.0
Notes:				
1. Spring salmon = multi-sea-winter salmon caught between 11 th Feb and 30 th April: Summer salmon = multi-sea-winter salmon caught between 1 st May and 30 th Sept: Grilse = one sea-winter salmon generally caught from May to September.				
2. Findhorn angling season opens on 11 th Feb and closes on 30 th September each year.				

Findhorn District Salmon Fishery Board Conservation Code 2017

RELEASE Anglers must release:

All fish caught up to 14th May inclusive (including dead fish)

From 15th May:

All fish over 9lbs / 28 inches (4 Kg / 72 cm)

All coloured, stale and gravid fish

As many hen fish as possible

RELEASE RATE Anglers are asked to achieve a minimum of:

75% of all salmon/grilse and sea trout caught **from the 15th May**

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.

Avoid using triple hooks.

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. Try and 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 and 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 river bank 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, considerably reducing their chances of recovery. Support it until it has recovered enough to swim away

Scottish Government Wild Fisheries Reform

The Scottish Government published its response to the Wild Fisheries Review on the 15th May 2015 which went out to public consultation in early 2015. The shift in title to Wild Fisheries Reform, rather than Review, indicated the Government's intention to progress to implementation to overhaul the existing fishery management structure in Scotland. This will potentially see the dissolution of Fishery Boards and Trusts to be replaced by Fishery Management Organisations (FMOs) responsible for delivering fishery management across a wider geographical area along with a considerable range of other changes.

The Scottish Government has also completed a draft Bill and fisheries strategy for a new wild fisheries management system, more details can be found at <http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2016/02/6138>. The Board and the FNLFT responded to the consultation in 2016.

The new Bill was due to be read at Parliament during autumn 2016 but disappointingly has been postponed. Meantime the various working groups with representatives from both Government and the fisheries sector have continued to contribute to the reform process. However, currently it is not clear when the Bill will be presented to the Scottish Parliament and we can expect to see changes in the management structure of freshwater fish and fisheries within Scotland. Further information can be found at:-

<http://www.asfb.org.uk/wild-fisheries-reform/>

<http://www.gov.scot/Topics/marine/Salmon-Trout-Coarse/fishreform>

One major change within Scottish freshwater fisheries management did occur during 2016 with the amalgamation of the Association of Fishery Boards (ASFB) and the Rivers and Fisheries Trusts Scotland (RAFTS) organisations. After consultation with members of both organizations it was agreed that the ASFB constitution be altered to open membership to Fisheries Trusts, in addition to District Salmon Fishery Boards and the new organization be called Fisheries Management Scotland (FMS). A new management board reflecting the new membership organization will be elected in January 2017 and further development of constitution, operations and website will be initiated in early 2017. Further details of the FMS development can be found at <http://www.asfb.org.uk/>.

Conserving Wild Salmon Proposals

The Scottish Government through Marine Science Scotland (MSS) continued to develop conservation limits models for Scottish rivers throughout 2016.

Assessing the conservation status of salmon is a straightforward idea as essentially it is determining whether or not the number of salmon spawning is above a critical threshold level. However, managing the uncertainties in assessing this leads to some complexity. [ICES](#) and countries reporting to [NASCO](#) have developed pragmatic approaches for applying conservation limits and these have been drawn on to construct the system for Scotland. The methods used are detailed in the technical document, <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0049/00491330.pdf>. The approach requires some knowledge of first, actual levels of spawning and second, the minimum acceptable (target) levels of spawning. The target level is also called the "conservation limit". Actual spawning levels are usually expressed in terms of egg deposition and rely on estimation of numbers of returning adult salmon from counters and catches. The conservation limits approach uses rod catches from the most recent 5 years to using a run reconstruction model. This value is then used to estimate egg deposition which is compared to the estimated egg requirement in order to assess the probability that the stock will equal or exceed its CL in each year (attainment of CL). Rivers are then graded 1 – 3 and local management actions applied as detailed below. During 2016 a number of improvements to the model have been included, for example improving estimates of wetted area utilised by salmon. Each river was then regraded in late 2016.

Grade 1 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 recognises the effectiveness of existing non-statutory local management although a Conservation plan for the future must be prepared.

The Rivers Findhorn and Nairn are in this category.

Grade 2 60-80% mean probability of CL being met in the last 5 years.

Management action is necessary to reduce exploitation though 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.

Grade 3 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 River Lossie remains in this category.

The respective Boards and angling associations on each of the three rivers have been briefed on these developments. The conservation limits model approach is still evolving and Marine Science Scotland (MSS) and Trust biologists have also establish a series of working groups to further develop and improve the approach.

River Superintendents Report

On February 11th 2016, Forres Angling Association held their opening ceremony at the Stoney pool; no clean fish were hooked but plenty of kelts to keep anglers interested. Around fifty members and guests attended the ceremony. Mr George Menzies was invited to open the season in recognition of his service to the Forres Angling Association for many years.

The first fresh run fish of the season weighing 18lbs, was caught on the 18th February by



George Menzies opens the 2016 Findhorn season at the Stoney Pool.

Leslie Tyson on the Altyre Beat, this early success carried on throughout the spring, lower to middle beats had good numbers of fresh fish. Summer salmon and grilse came in good numbers but when August came, the river was low and stayed like that for some weeks.

We had some decent water levels at times this year and that improved the number of fish entering the river, the end of year returns show an improvement on the overall catch and returns, we are over 86% return rate on Salmon/Grilse this year. Billy and I went up to the spawning grounds in early November to see what kind of numbers we had, the head of the river was absolutely stuffed with large salmon ready to move up to the Cro and the Eskin burns to spawn.

I urge all anglers to continue with their support by adhering to the conservation code in the new season.

Poaching Control

We have seen a significant increase in poaching activity this year, this occurred throughout the system, from up at Moy, down to the bay at Findhorn. We had over twenty six illegal fishers in August and September alone, we stopped over eight in the bay itself, mostly these were holidaymakers just fishing and not realizing they are fishing illegally, we advised them to get a permit as it was illegal to fish in the bay without one, it would also benefit the local angling club and they could fish in peace. The ticket sales increased by two books this year with regular patrolling and advise to anglers. We took a fair number of fishing rods and equipment from poachers too.



A selection of rods confiscated from poachers during the 2016 season.

We also had problems with some poachers in September up at Moy, they were warned off and moved on, the police were informed and they kept a close eye on the area too. I had a great response from the upper beats; they were delighted to see the bailiffs patrolling on a regular basis.

We help to patrol the River Lossie, with over eighty hours of patrolling carried out this year, we continue to support the river Lossie in the protection of the river and its coast, on Thursday the 8th of August we were patrolling the mouth of the Lossie in the early hours, we came across a known poacher who we caught and charged last year. Once again he was fishing without a permit, was aggressive and did not comply with our requests, the police were called and he was arrested and charged with a number of offences, this incident was only one out of

seven we had over the season on the River Lossie. Although most poachers behave reasonably when approached we have experienced an increase in more aggressive and threatening behaviour and on one occasion a poacher brandished a knife. This type of incident has not been common but to improve our personal protection, the Board have approved the purchase of protective vests.

To further improve bailiffing we team up regularly with Alastair Skinner, Nairn bailiff, to mount joint patrols across all three rivers. This season we have also purchased and utilised wildlife cameras. These can operate throughout the day and night, are motion sensitive and link directly into our phones allowing us to increase our coverage of the rivers.

We also meet regularly with bailiffs from the Spey and the Police through the Riverwatch meetings to discuss incidents, techniques and exchange information.



Not a poacher, but a roe deer caught on camera while testing our new surveillance cameras.

Seal Management

The Findhorn remains part of the Moray Firth Seal Management Plan and a licence is granted each year to control a small number of seals which migrate into the river and directly affect fish stocks. Over this summer, Orca whales were often seen in the Moray Firth which in turn may have moved the seals away from the coast for a few weeks at a time and gave the summer salmon/grilse a break from predation. Our seal counts in October were particularly low with only 4 seals present at the mouth of the river.



Aerial photo of seals near the mouth of the Findhorn, (photo Paul Warrener)

We continued to carry out regular counts of the seals near the mouth of the Findhorn during 2016. In general the counts ranged from 160 to 345 seals, although as already mentioned our October count was very low at only 4 seals! We are looking to improve our counting approach in 2017 with the use of drones and comparing the data from these with our visual counts.

Sawbill Management

Sawbill counts were carried out during the year and figures were given to the Findhorn, Nairn and Lossie Fisheries Trust, the bailiffs and public also reported sightings with pictures of sawbills to the trust which also helped to secure a license, the sawbill license was actioned over the spring period, see below for more details.

Fisheries Management

We continue to work closely with the FNL Trust, and this year we have helped out with spraying Giant Hogweed, American Mink trapping, water sampling, redd surveys and schools projects, we also helped on the installation and day to day running of the River Nairn's Smolt trap. Billy was preparing and reading salmon and smolt scales with the Trust during the winter.

As this year comes to an end, I would like to thank all volunteers, estates and Keepers for their assistance and continued support you have given through-out the year, Thanks also to the Assistant Bailiff Billy Forrester and River Bailiff Alistair Skinner from the Nairn.

Sean Mclean, River Superintendent, Mobile: 07920483081

Findhorn, Nairn and Lossie Fisheries Trust Report

The Findhorn, Nairn and Lossie Fisheries Trust promote sustainable management of river resources and fish populations through research, restoration and education. To achieve this, the Trust works closely with the District Salmon Fishery Board for each river, and other relevant organisations. A charity and company limited by guarantee, the Trust relies on grants, donations and fundraising to implement projects.

A key element of the Trust's work is in implementing the Fishery Management Plans (FMP) for each river. These describe the current state of each river and fishery, describe current issues and identify and prioritise actions needed to improve the rivers and fisheries. The plans were developed using funding from Scottish Government and the Rivers and Fisheries Trusts Scotland (RAFTS) and copies can be downloaded from <http://www.fnift.org.uk/projects/>.

The Trust reviews the FMPs each year. Based on this review, progress made in the most recent year, and emerging issues, the Trust chooses projects to focus on in the next year. The Trust's first FMPs were written in 2010; thus much of the work to be done involves finding out more about the status of the rivers and the salmon, sea trout and other native fish populations.

This reports details activities carried out on the River Findhorn during 2016 and where this relates to the fisheries management plan is shown in brackets. Further details of the work of the Trust on the Nairn and Lossie can be found on www.fnift.org.uk.

Juvenile Salmon and Trout Stock Assessment (FMP3.1)

An electrofishing survey of the Findhorn tributaries and coastal burns was completed in 2016 and several fish surveys were also completed as ongoing monitoring of wind farm developments. The number of electrofishing sites



A fine wee trout from the lower Kinloss Burn

completed are shown in Table 2.



Electrofishing the Banchor Burn. The burn is still showing the effects of the August 2014 spate with large gravel deposits on each side and no bankside vegetation. Juvenile salmon numbers had improved (see inset) after a complete absence after the 2014 spate.

For the general survey of the Findhorn and coastal burns (Muckle, Mosset and Kinloss) juvenile salmon were found at 24 survey sites (70%) and juvenile trout were present at 30 survey sites (88%). This indicates a good distribution of salmon and trout around the catchment

similar to previous surveys.

Juvenile salmon were more prevalent in the larger wider tributaries while trout numbers tended to be greater in the upper reaches of burns and in the smaller burns generally. A few surprises were evident including a population of trout still present in

the Kinloss burn which has been severely dredged and modified over the last decades. Two burns near Tomatin, the Clune Burn and the Banchor Burn, had been severely damaged by the spate in August 2014 and surveys shortly afterwards indicated a near complete loss of juvenile salmon and trout. This year's survey indicated a substantial improvement particularly in salmon numbers indicating the burns were beginning to recover. Eels, minnows, lamprey and flounders were also found during the survey with particularly high numbers of eels recorded in the lower Mosset Burn.

Data has been compiled into the Scottish Fisheries Co-ordination Centre ([SFCC](#)) database and further analysis of the survey data will be completed during spring 2017 to compare with historical trends and also to provide an estimate of smolt output for the river.

To examine smolt output further we have secured the use of a rotary screw trap from the [Atlantic Salmon Trust](#) for 2017. Ideally a smolt trap would be positioned on the lower main stem to provide an estimate of smolt output for the whole of the river. However, although one or two locations looked promising for a trap, the scale of the lower river, its volatility and the difficulties anchoring and accessing the trap have led us to opt for a tributary of the Findhorn instead. So the trap will be trialled on the River Divie by kind permission of Mark Laing Dunphail Estate, in March 2017. A good set of electrofishing data is already available for the Divie catchment so estimates of smolt output can be derived and compared with the capture rates in the trap.

<i>Findhorn and Coastal Burn Survey 2016</i>		
	<i>Depletion Sites</i>	<i>Timed EF Sites</i>
<i>Findhorn Tributaries</i>	<i>25</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>Muckle Burn</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>0</i>
<i>Mosset Burn</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>0</i>
<i>Kinloss Burn</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Total</i>	<i>29</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>Wind Farm Monitoring Surveys 2016</i>		
<i>Moy WF</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Tom nan Clach WF</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>2</i>

Table 2: Electrofishing sites completed within the Findhorn during 2016.

Adult Salmon and Trout Scale Collection (FMP2.1)

Basic data from salmon and trout catches is an important component to managing a river. Catch data is routinely collected for the Findhorn but data from scales, weight, sex ratio, fishing effort etc. is often absent. Scales in particular provide an important insight into the age structure of the fish population. In time this can also provide an insight in changes in run time and growth within the river and/or the sea perhaps reflecting changes in ocean or climate conditions.

Scale collection started in 2013 and continued in 2016 with a further 50 salmon scale samples submitted from the Findhorn (Table 3) along with 12 sea trout/brown trout scale samples from the Findhorn and Muckle Burn. We are again very grateful to all those anglers who took the time to collect them. Initial readings have been completed and we are checking the data with the help of Iain Maclaren and other experts at Marine Science Scotland, a report will be available on the web site shortly and circulated to anglers.

Findhorn Location	Number of Scale Samples
Forres AA	3
Darnaway	5
Lethen	38

Dunphail	3
Divie	1
Total	50

Table 3: Findhorn salmon scale samples 2016.

Invasive Non-Native Plant Control (FMP4.2)

The Board continued to support the control of non-native plants along the river during 2016 providing both funds and staff time. This also enabled FNLFT to secure additional funding from, the Postcode Local Trust, SITA Trust, Berry Burn Wind Farm Community Fund, SEPA Water Environment Fund and the Forres Common Good Fund to continue the battle against Giant Hogweed and Japanese Knotweed.

Control concentrated on repeating spraying the areas tackled in previous years as well as tackling the upper limits of the Giant Hogweed infestations near Daltulich Bridge. However, a few isolated giant hogweed plants were found further upstream this year at Logie Bridge and within Coulmony estate. These plants were treated by FNLFT and Coulmony staff but it illustrates the need to be vigilant and so the area will be monitored in future years.

From Daltulich the Findhorn enters a spectacular gorge section and although this offers relatively inhospitable habitat for giant hogweed some plants are present and similar to 2015, the local white water rafting specialists "[Ace Adventure](#)" were contracted for two trips through the gorge to treat giant hogweed and Japanese knotweed.

Funding this year allowed specialist contractors, John Parrott (Coillie Alba) and Angus Dixon (Groves Forestry) to be employed. This the allowed larger and dense infestations around Dalvey, Altyre and Mundole to be tackled. Findhorn bailiffs, Sean Maclean and Billy Forester and volunteer Scott Galbraith (UHI) continued treatments at Mundole Farm and around the Stoney Pool with the tremendous support from Jenny Davidson (Mundole Farm) and Dalvey estate. Good progress is being made. Forres AA river watcher Steve Pannel also worked tirelessly throughout the season to maintain paths and control of hogweed and knotweed throughout the Forres AA beat and funding assisted in supplying him with protective

equipment and Round-up. In addition Darnaway, Lethen and Glenferness estates were all supplied with round-up and PPE to assist with their control activities.

We continued to work with "[Wild Things](#)", a local environment education group based in Findhorn and combined efforts to treat Giant hogweed downstream from the A96 particularly around the Waterford recycling centre.

Local volunteers from Forres continued to meet on Monday nights to tackle the giant hogweed along the Mosset and Rafford Burns. This season the Mosset Burn was again treated from Rafford and Altyre to the Mill of Grange Bridge below the Ben Romach Distillery. The additional funding allowed more Round-up to be purchased and this will also allow treatments to continue in 2017. Additional volunteers are always welcome, please contact the Trust office 0309 611220.

While spraying with round-up remains central to our control of non-native plants we have also developed and assisted with a range of other techniques, long pole saws have been purchased and cutting the hogweed as it flowers before forming seeds has been very effective, with Wild Things we also tried digging up the roots in February/March and again this also proved effective, this approach is also used on part of the Mosset Burn. For Japanese knotweed we have largely moved to stem injection and although a little awkward this has also proved more effective than spraying and uses less round-up. We continue to look at alternative approaches for the future.



Giant hogweed on the cliffs near the Broadreeds pool present a difficult access and control problem.

The dense infestations will take many further years of control before they are reduced to a manageable level. Indeed this year we were disappointed to recorded a relatively new and dense infestation of Giant hogweed on the cliffs near the Broadreeds Pool, Lower Home beat. The cliff is a steep, wet and very awkward area to apply treatment but we are discussing some options with local forestry contractors.

We are very grateful to the funders, to all the estate owners and staff and volunteers for their continued support throughout 2016 which has allowed good progress to be made. However, all these funds have been utilised and we are looking into new options for 2017. The Scottish Invasive Species Initiative (SISI) a Heritage Lottery project developed through the Rivers and Fisheries Trust Scotland ([RAFTS](#)) which could provide funding for further control for 3 to 5 years has been progressed a little further but currently there is no decision on whether this will go ahead.



FNLFT director, Bob Laughton and Laura Smith (Wild Things) discuss progress on Giant Hogweed control in the Findhorn catchment with local MSP Richard Lochhead.



Scott Galbraith (UHI) using a long pole saw to control Giant Hogweed.



Neil MacDonald (Dunphail Estate) stem injecting Japanese knotweed.

Mink Control (FMP4.1)

Funding for this initiative ceased in early 2016 but bailiffs, Sean MacLean, Alastair Skinner and Billy Forrester still maintain contacts with keepers and volunteers within the three river catchments and respond to any sightings by installing a trap in the vicinity. A few sightings have been reported and one mink was captured on the lower Mosset Burn during 2016.

Should you spot a mink please contact: FNLFT office 01309 611220, email director@fnlft.org.uk or Sean McLean 07920483081 or Alastair Skinner 07825554808.

Predator Management (FMP4.1)

Sawbill ducks (goosanders, mergansers) and cormorants can also affect juvenile and smolt stocks. Regular counts were completed throughout 2016 (Figures 4 to 6) from Findhorn Bay upstream to Cawdor. Counts were generally carried out walking each beat or section of the river simultaneously, typically between 08:00 and 10:00. In Findhorn Bay counts are taken

from several fixed points around the Bay. I am very grateful to all the estate staff and keepers who joined the bailiffs to complete the counts.

Figure 4 indicates that goosanders are generally present in the Bay and on the river throughout the year. Numbers vary seasonal, with higher numbers present in winter and through to spring. The pattern reflects the behaviour of the birds with larger numbers migrating into the Bay during late autumn and winter then beginning to pair up in the spring and move up river to find breeding sites. After mating typically in around May, the males leave the river and head back off to sea while the females remain to and raise their brood. Although we don't regularly count during June to September *ad hoc* observations generally indicate that female birds with chicks are also present on the river during the summer. Numbers begin to build up from October again as males return and chicks reach adult size, although it take around two years for a bird to reach breeding size and full adult plumage. Goosander counts during 2016 were generally lower than in 2015 in both the Bay and along the river.

Figure 5 provides the counts for mergansers during 2016. The lifecycle for mergansers is similar to that of goosanders although they tend to remain more along coast and lower reaches of the river. Merganser numbers tend to be lower than goosanders and similarly our counts in 2016 were lower than those in 2015. The May river count was higher than usual and it is not clear why this pattern was evident it has not been observed in previous years.

Figure 6 shows cormorant counts for 2016 and they tend to be present in the Bay during the winter, perhaps to seek shelter from stormier sea conditions and take advantage of easier feeding opportunities on post spawning kelts! They do make their way up river and have been observed as far upstream as Dulce Bridge. They usually disappear from the river by late spring. The counts in 2016 were very similar to those of 2015.

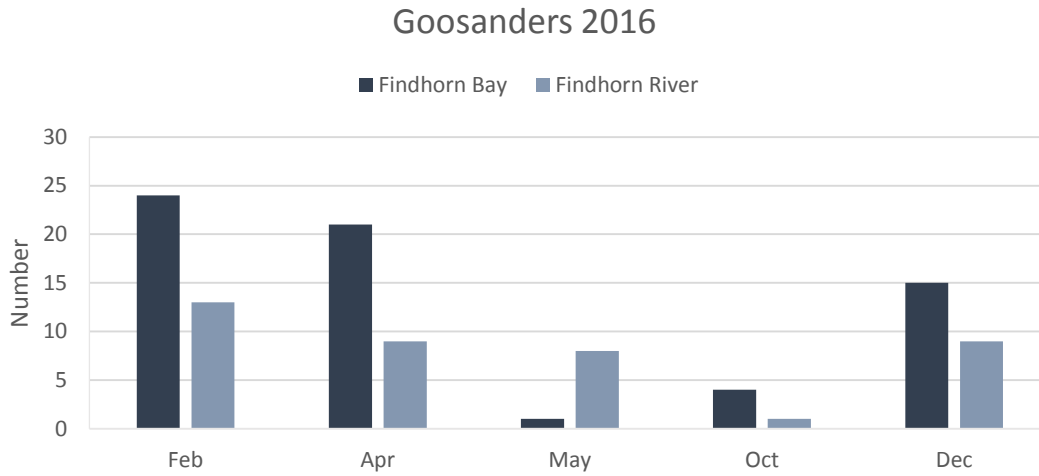


Figure 4: Goosander count data from Findhorn Bay and river during 2016.

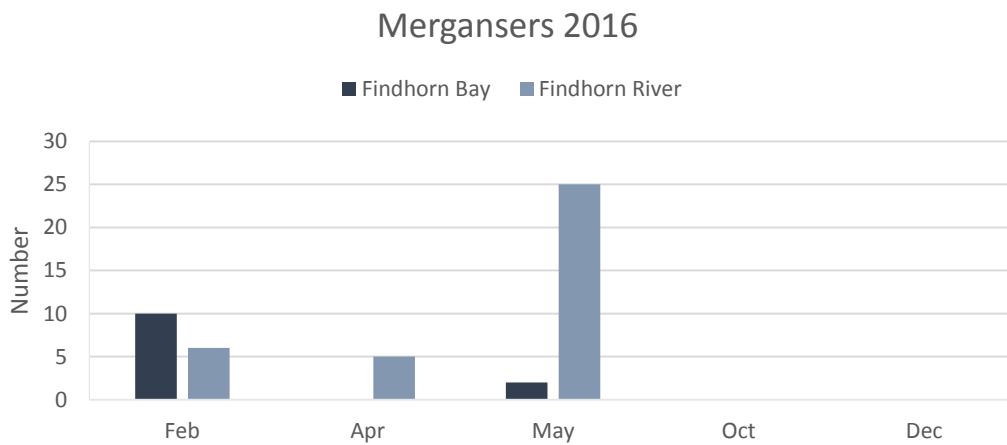


Figure 5: Merganser count data from Findhorn bay and river during 2016.

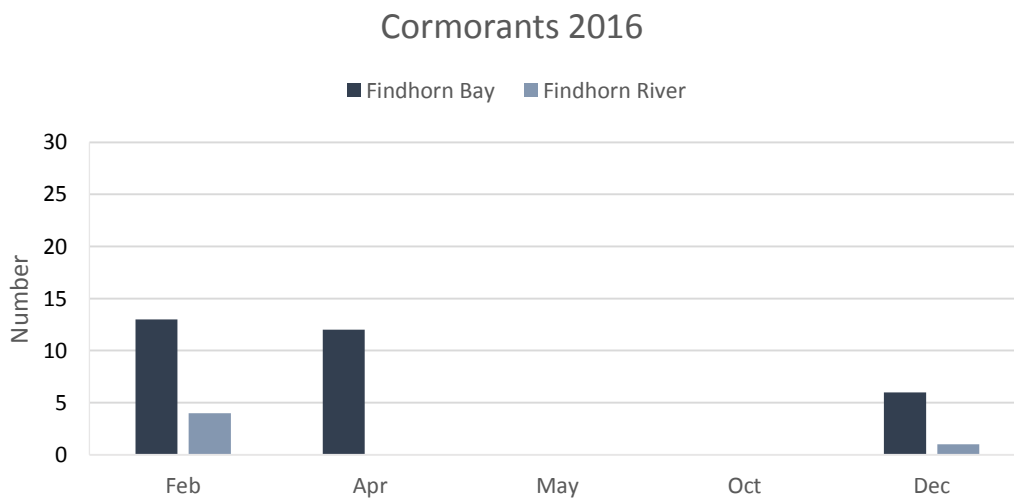


Figure 6: Cormorant count data from bay and river during 2016.

Based on these count data and counts from neighbouring rivers a joint licence application for control of these birds within the Moray Firth river's during the smolt run was submitted by Roger Knight from the River Spey. This was successful allowing birds to be controlled from 1st October 2015 to 31st May 2016. This included 8 goosanders, 6 mergansers and 2 cormorants for the Findhorn, Nairn and Lossie. Apart from one cormorant this quota was met. Part of the licence requirements is also to retrieve carcasses for diet analysis but sadly it was not possible to retrieve them from the river. Scaring tactics were also used by firing blank cartridges at selected locations to disturb the birds through the smolt run. Data from 2016 has also been submitted for a licence for 1st Oct 2016 to 31st May 2017. This has been secured but quota numbers for this period have been reduced due to reduced counts across the Moray Firth Rivers. The Findhorn, Nairn and Lossie quota this winter was issued within the licence for 1 goosander and 2 mergansers. Counts and scaring tactics will continue throughout 2017.

Any additional sightings of these birds on the river from anglers is also welcomed, please send any data to Bob Laughton at director@fnlft.org.uk or by text to 07887535986, providing date, location and number/type of birds.

Catchment Developments (FMP1.3)

Wind Farms

The monitoring programme on the Berry Burn wind farm was completed in March 2016 and the data is with Iain Malcolm and his team at Marine Science Scotland for more detailed analysis.

Construction of the Moy wind farm was completed in early 2016 and officially opened in May 2015. Within the development all river crossings have been constructed with open span bridges ensuring fish have unrestricted access to spawning areas and drainage ditches have suitable silt control methods installed minimising any silt input to the burns. A three year monitoring plan of the fish populations in the Moy burn and its upper tributaries was completed in September 2016.

Salmon and trout were the dominate fish species with salmon occupying the lower wider reaches of the Moy and trout more prevalent in the upper tributaries. Surveys indicated that construction activities did not appear to have any detrimental effect on the populations. The

large spate in August 2014 appeared to be the biggest influence on fish populations with a reduction in juveniles fish observed in the surveys in late 2014, surveys in 2015 and 2016 indicated fish densities had improved and were in keeping with historical data collected prior to the start of the wind farm development.

Construction of the access roads to the Tom nan Clach wind farm began in late 2016. The roads and the wind farm impinge on the Tomlachlan, Leonach and Rhilean Burns all of which have substantial waterfalls preventing salmon and sea trout access. However, all three burns have resident trout populations and it is particularly important to protect and ensure these fragile sub-populations are protected. The Trust has liaised closely with the developers and advised on river crossings to ensure fish passage is not affected. A three year monitoring plan has also been established with the first surveys completed in September 2016.

The Trust continue to monitor for any other wind farm developments and provide appropriate comments.

Road Developments (A9 and A96)

Dualling of the A9 continues to gather pace and the next section to be constructed is likely to be in the Moy – Tomatin length. The Trust has already commented on plans, particularly bridge crossings and other factors affecting burns in the area. Data on fish populations has also been provided and the Trust will continue to liaise closely with the developers.

The dualling of A96 is also gathering pace with plans now developed for the section from Inverness to Nairn-Hardmuir. The next section from Hardmuir to Fochabers is in early design stage with no preferred route identified at the moment. The Trust has attend initial public meetings and will continue to monitor the development and provide appropriate advice and comments.

The Trust have also liaised closely with BAM who are constructing the new railway crossing and station in Forres which includes a new bridge over the Mosset Burn. The bridge will be open span and ensure that fish can still access the Mosset in the future.

Moray Firth Trout Initiative (FMP2.1)

The Moray Firth Trout Initiative concluded in 2016 after three years of gathering data and raising awareness of our important trout stocks. Marcus Walters the development officer has

joined the Deveron, Bogie and Isla Trust and we wish him well in his new post. For full details of the project click here ([MFTI](#)).

Publicity (FMP7.1)

The Trust produce regular newsletters and updates on activities can also be found on our web site www.fnlft.org.uk and now on Facebook.

Acknowledgements

I am particularly grateful to Valerie Wardlaw, Seymour Monro, Mark Laing and the steering committee for all their encouragement and help during the past year.

The FNLFT are extremely grateful for the continuing support of the Findhorn DSFB, Forres AA, Logie Estate, RAFTS, ASFB, MSS Freshwater Lab, SFCC, and the Moray Firth Trout Initiative.

Thanks also to Sean Maclean (FDSFB), Billy Forrester (FDSFB), Ali Skinner (NDSFB), Fraser Laughton, Scott Galbraith, Haden Beck and Matthew Davies for their assistance in electro fishing and with other projects. Thanks also to Pauline Proudlock (MSS), Denise Sterling (MSS), Alastair McCartney (MSS), Karen Millidine (MSS) and Ian Malcolm (MSS) with water sample collection and analysis. Thanks to Chas Emes (Aquaterra) for invertebrate collection and analysis.

I am extremely grateful to Ian Suttie, Ian Macintosh, James Bromham, Adam Howarth, Pat Carroll, John Parrott, Angus Dixon, Jenny Davidson, Wild Things, Ace Adventure and many others for their considerable help with the treatment of Giant Hogweed and Japanese knotweed. Thanks also to all the volunteers who look after mink rafts and traps.

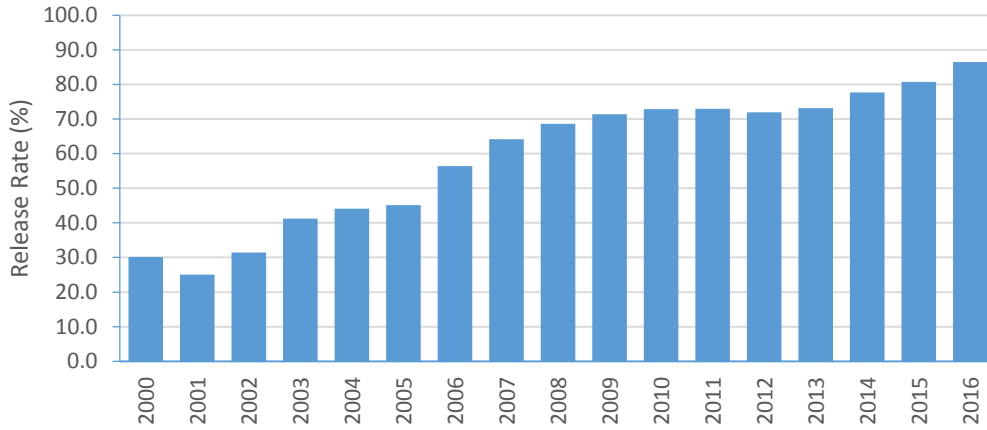
Thanks also to all the proprietors and anglers who have generously donated to the Trust and, in particular, Ewen Brodie and Julie Balgowie for their fundraising efforts.

Appendix 1: River Findhorn Catch Data 2000-2016

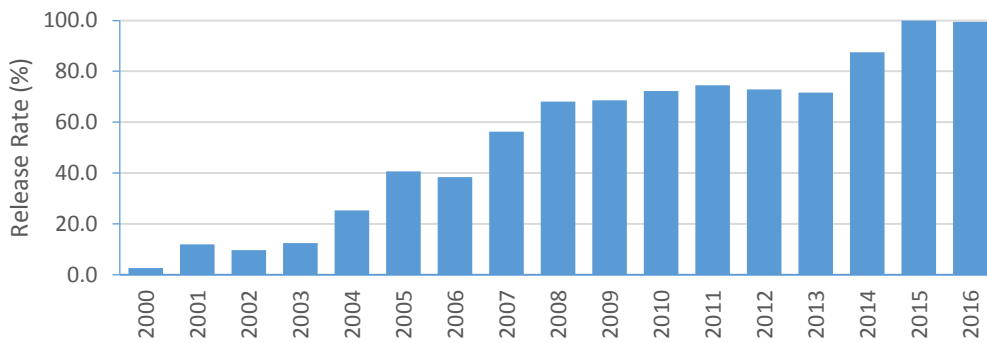
Rod catch data for each Findhorn beat during 2016.

	SALMON RETAINED	SALMON RELEASED	RELEASED %	GRILSE RETAINED	GRILSE RELEASED	RELEASED %	OVERALL PERCENT RELEASED	S TROUT RETAINED	S TROUT RELEASED	RELEASED
LOCATION	No	No	%	No	No	%	%	No	No	%
Coignafearn	4	3	43%				43%			
Daltomich	1	9	90%				90%			
Glenmazeran		13	100%				100%			
Dalmigavie	3	24	89%	1	7	88%	89%			
East Clune	2	12	86%		4	100%	89%			
Glen Kirk		13	100%				100%			
Strathdearn (Banchor)	2	15	88%		3	100%	90%		2	100%
Dalmigarry (Morlie & Corrievorrie)		22	100%		5	100%	100%			
Glen Kyllachy	1	19	95%	1		0%	90%			
Findhorn Bridge(Old Clune)	3	6	67%	2	2	50%	62%			
Kyllachy	1	16	94%		9	100%	96%			
Corrybrough		13	100%				100%			
Tomatin	5	51	91%	1		0%	89%		3	100%
Balnespick	12	29	71%	3	3	50%	68%			
Moy (Upper)	9	29	76%				76%			
Moy (Pollochaig)	7	70	91%		2	100%	91%		1	100%
Drynachan	36	270	88%	8	48	86%	88%			
Banchor	3	21	88%	1	1	50%	85%			
Lethen	14	210	94%	12	59	83%	91%	1	5	83%
Glenferness	15	103	87%	10	54	84%	86%		3	100%
Coulmony	2	7	78%		4	100%	85%			
Logie	7	53	88%	9	7	44%	79%		1	100%
Dunphail		4	100%	1	3	75%	88%			
Moray Estates	5	181	97%	24	72	75%	90%		11	100%
Altyre Estate	1	76	99%		31	100%	99%		14	100%
Forres AA	21	115	85%	72	210	74%	78%	10	86	90%
TOTAL	154	1384	90%	145	524	78%	86%	11	126	92%
Total Catch for 2016	Salmon + Grilse 2207						Sea Trout 137			

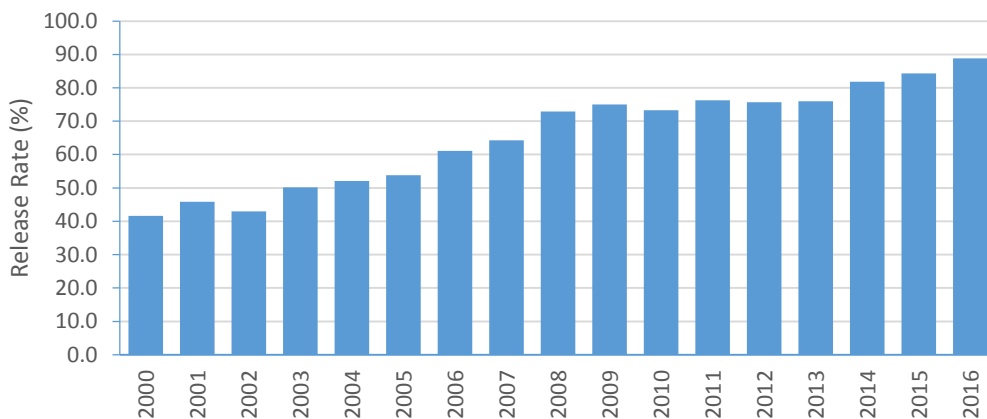
Findhorn: Salmon and Grilse Release Rate (%) 2000-2016



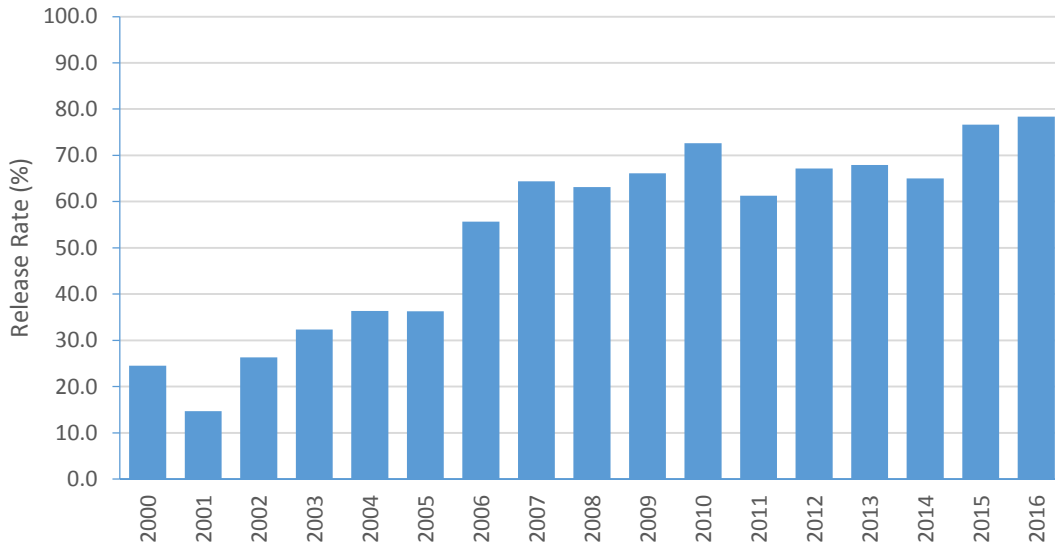
Findhorn: Spring Salmon Release Rate (%) 2000-2016



Findhorn: Summer Salmon Release Rate (%) 2000-2016



Findhorn: Grilse Release Rate(%)
2000-2016



Findhorn: Sea Trout Release Rate (%)
2000-2016

