



Ayrshire Rivers Trust

working to improve Ayrshire's rivers and lochs

River Girvan District Salmon Fishery Board 2024/2025 ANNUAL REPORT



The River Girvan at Straiton

Board members

Lady Jenny Ferguson, Kilkerran Estate (Chair)

Sir Patrick Hunter Blair, Milton of Blairquhan

Douglas Waugh, Robstone

John Dalrymple Hamilton, Bargany Estate

Graham Scobie, Kilkerran and Dailly (Anglers representative)

Thomas Thompson, Head Bailiff

Clerk

Stuart Brabbs, c/o Ayrshire Rivers Trust, 2 Crosshill Cottages, Mauchline KA5 5HJ

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Clerical Administrator

Jennifer Garland, Ayrshire Rivers Trust, 2 Crosshill Cottages, Mauchline KA5 5HJ

Advisers

Struan Candlish, Ayrshire Rivers Trust

Carolyn Bryce, Ayrshire Rivers Trust

Contents

1. Statutory Remit
2. a) Aims of the Board
b) The Catchment
c) The Fishing Beats
3. Report from the Chair for the 2024/2025 season
4. Report from the Clerk to the Board
 - a) Fishery Assessment
 - b) Governance Matters
 - c) Annual Catch Returns
 - d) Consultation Responses
 - e) Financial Report
 - f) Draft Accounts
5. Bailiffs Report
6. Website
7. Ayrshire Rivers Trust Report
8. Acknowledgements

1. Statutory Remit of the River Girvan District Salmon Fishery Board

The River Girvan District Salmon Fishery Board was established under the 1862 and 1868 Salmon Fisheries Legislation, as subsequently amended in the Salmon Act 1986 and the Salmon Conservation (Scotland) Act 2001. This legislation was later amalgamated under the Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries (Consolidation) (Scotland) Act 2003 (“**the 2003 Act**”), which has subsequently been amended by the Aquaculture and Fisheries (Scotland) Acts 2007 and 2013.

The River Girvan District Salmon Fishery Board is empowered under Part 3 of the 2003 Act to manage the protection, enhancement and conservation of the Atlantic salmon and migratory trout (sea trout) stocks in the River Girvan.

2. (a) The Aims of the Board

- Provide fishery protection
- Police the purchase and sale of illegally caught and unseasonable fish
- Protect juvenile fish and spawning redds
- Ensure fish passage over obstacles to migration
- Reverse the trend in the decline of adult salmon and migratory trout by implementing policies that safeguard and enhance natural spawning stock
- Conduct habitat, population and migration assessments to guide management strategies
- Encourage good conservation policies and enforce mandatory conservation measures where applicable
- Encourage and promote sustainable fisheries across the catchment

(b) The Catchment

The Water of Girvan is commonly known and herein referred to as the River Girvan. The source of the river is Loch Girvan Eye in the Galloway hills from where it flows north through Loch Skelloch and then Loch Bradan (reservoir) before reaching Tairlaw Linn; an impassable waterfall that marks the upper limit of migration for salmon and trout. From this waterfall the river continues flowing northwards past Straiton until it turns to the south west near Kirkmichael and continues towards the sea at Girvan. In total the river is 61km (38 miles) long and the catchment extends to 250 square kilometres (96.5 square miles).

Along its course there are numerous small tributaries that join off both banks. These smaller burns offer important spawning grounds for both salmon and trout although often access to the upper reaches is limited by the steep slopes that rise from the valley floor. Never the less, some are very productive indeed.

The land use within the catchment is varied with conifer plantations in the headwaters and arable and dairy production further downstream, all influential to the catchment’s

water quality and productivity. There is a Fishery Management Plan written by Ayrshire Rivers Trust (ART) biologists that is available on the Board's website. This document highlights pressures and priorities across the catchment and the Board works closely with the Trust to address the main pressures as funding allows.

(c) Fishing beats along the river

Across Scotland, there has been considerable reduction in salmon numbers returning to our rivers as adults and here in the Girvan catchment, we too face these same declines although not so extreme as experienced further north in Argyll, Lochaber, Wester Ross and West Sutherland where aquaculture has impacted stocks tremendously since it became common in the latter 20th Century.

In total there are 35 beats on the river and all have salmon and trout fishing rights. Many are no longer fished by choice however, there are other's that rarely, if ever see an angler that could be productive if publicly made available for fishing by the owners. The lack of rod catch is detrimental to river values and is misleading when Scottish Government (Marine Directive) use these data to calculate an estimate of the numbers of salmon returning to our water, deposit their eggs and ultimately the conservation status. It is therefore in everybody's interest to see more anglers catching fish on the river. Our advisers at Ayrshire Rivers Trust report that juvenile stocks are buoyant and the Girvan is one of the most consistent local rivers in terms of juvenile production.

There are still plenty of anglers in Ayrshire and further afield that may be willing to travel to the Girvan for fishing if it were better publicised and more readily available. To this end, all proprietors are welcome and indeed encouraged to have a free listing on the new Board website advertising their fishing and permit availability. There may even be scope for a central booking hub at some point but that would need worked out. The Clerk can advise anyone looking to market their fishing in the coming season.



A late season salmon captured and released on the upper river

3. The Chair's Report

This is my first report as Chair following appointment just over a year ago.

I would like to start by thanking Sir Patrick Hunter Blair for his many years of service as Chair, and I would also like to thank him for remaining on the Board and providing wise counsel to me and to the rest of the Board and staff.

Almost immediately after I became Chair, Austin Thomson, our long-standing Clerk, announced his retirement. I tried not to think that there might have been a link... Austin was Clerk to the Board for a great many years and we are all very grateful to him for his loyal service.

The role of Clerk requires thorough knowledge of the workings and aims of the River Board and the ability to make sure that it is fulfilling its obligations correctly. We are very fortunate that Stuart Brabbs of the Ayrshire Rivers Trust has taken on the mantle. He has already shown great determination and skill in getting on top of the multitude of legal requirements with which the Board is obliged to comply, and he has also got to grips with the finances of the Board. In all of this he is ably assisted by Jennifer Garland. I am confident that in Stuart we have a safe pair of hands as Clerk.

Of course Stuart's main role is with the Ayrshire Rivers Trust, from whom you will be hearing more this evening. It is thanks to their work that we know there are good stocks of juvenile salmon in the Girvan. Despite all of the well known problems relating to climate change, pollution, salmon farming and the uncertainty of what is happening to the fish at sea, there are fish in the river. I have not seen many returns yet, so I don't know how well this year has gone, but with a healthy level of juvenile fish there are good prospects ahead, so I hope you will be getting out there and enjoying the fishing, and even if you are not lucky on the day, enjoying the benefits of time spent outside on the banks of the beautiful Water of Girvan.

4. The Clerk's Report

I took over as Clerk to the River Girvan District Salmon Fishery Board in mid-September 2025 from Austin Thomson of Frazer Coogans Solicitors. Having worked closely with all the Board's and Clerks in Ayrshire over the last 18 years, I am under no misconception of the work involved to fulfil this role particularly, as we face the challenges of declining catches and anglers. Once through the initial transition period, I'm certain the workload will reduce and things should run smoothly.

Most of this report applies to the year ending 31/03/2025 prior to me taking over as Clerk therefore I can't really comment much on that period but I have made a few points to indicate the changes that lie ahead.

The first task I faced was to stabilise the Board's finances and recover any outstanding debts. Without a consistent income, the Board's ability to deliver its statutory role and

improvements are impossible. Thankfully, most owners promptly settled their accounts allowing us to move forwards and we are grateful for this.

For clarity and in accordance with the legislation that applies to the operation of District Salmon Fishery Boards, (The Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries (Consolidation) (Scotland) Act 2003, (herein referred to as the Act) we will operate strict payment terms, add interest for late payments and if necessary, pursue debtors each year as any business must.

(a) Fishery Assessments

The assessment rate was held at 0.65/£ for the 2024/2025 season. This reflects the Board's concern to maintain their financial stability while also understanding the difficulties faced by proprietors in a time that fishing related income has dropped considerably.

At the October 2025 Board meeting, members of the Board again discussed the rate and agreed to hold it at 0.65/£ on the value set by Ayrshire Joint Valuation Board (AVJB). This will be the 4th consecutive year at the same rate.

The Board are conscious that the annual assessments must be affordable but they must also be at a level that enables the Board to function and deliver its remit. The valuations of the river are set independent of the Board by the AVJB's assessor following the same protocols used to value other Scottish salmon rivers.

It should be noted that the rate of inflation (RPI) since January 2015 until September 2025 has increased by 59.00%. The value of the river over the same period has increased by 1.1% while the assessment rate has reduced by 10%. Consequently, it is clear that the Board assessments have not kept pace with RPI and may need to be adjusted at the next opportunity.

Figure 1. The changing value of the river and rate of assessment over the last 10 years

Year	Value	Rate of Levy p/£	Value to be raised by assessment
2015/2016	£22,350.00	0.72	£16,092.00
2016/2017	£22,350.00	0.71	£15,868.50
2017/2018	£24,230.00	0.70	£16,961.00
2018/2019	£24,230.00	0.70	£16,961.00
2019/2020	£24,055.00	0.70	£16,838.50
2020/2021	£23,505.00	0.58	£13,632.90
2021/2022	£23,505.00	0.65	£15,278.25
2022/2023	£23,505.00	0.65	£15,278.25
2023/2024	£23,075.00	0.65	£14,998.75
2024/2025	£22,600.00	0.65	£14,690.00

Traditionally angling revenue paid for the annual assessments on many beats however, in recent years this has declined across most of Scotland.

(b) Governance

Again, I am unable to comment on governance matters prior to my tenure of the role commencing. However, it seemed prudent to review the entire Board operation to ensure compliance with the latest Government requirements.

I have been producing new governance documents that once approved by the Board will be published on the website (more on this below). Fisheries Management Scotland recently issued updated guidance on District Salmon Fishery Board's remit and how this is expected to be delivered. Essentially the Clerk's role is to ensure that the Board are compliant and meet their obligations and I will be following the FMS guidance closely.

(c) Annual catch returns

Annual catch reporting appears to have been poorly undertaken in recent years and this is damaging to values of beats on the river. It is a legal requirement to submit the completed form to the Board. This allows us to report to other's as we are required to do.

We have few records of the catch from the 2024 season but we believe this was similar to the previous season at around 30 salmon. That is a poor statistic for the Girvan and it may be a reflection of low rod effort as much as anything else. Juvenile stocks indicate that adult salmon are returning and spawning most seasons in fairly consistent numbers. It may also be due to under reporting by anglers or proprietors or just poor fishing conditions. We cannot be certain as there doesn't appear to be paperwork available to support this or any theory.

It is obvious we must improve catch return accuracy in future and in an effort to achieve this, we have simplified the annual catch return form for reporting salmon and sea trout captured during the season. This should cause less confusion and errors in the annual catch reporting. Additionally, we made it easier for submissions to be returned to the Clerk by email or text messaging. The new form has been circulated to all proprietors along with the assessment notices for the 2025/2026 season. We would appreciate prompt returns of the catch statistics please.

Please note that Marine Directorate require their own forms to be completed independent of the Board. The two reporting forms should not be confused. It is a legal requirement to complete and submit both the Board's and Marine Directorate's forms on time to the respective addresses.

(d) Consultation Responses

Ayrshire Planning Department has been made aware of the change of Clerk to the Board. The Clerk will respond to consultations on behalf of the Board that potentially affect the river.

The Clerk has close links with Ayrshire Rivers Trust who will provide scientific oversight and comment on any consultations they see fit. With co-operation, the two organisations will serve to ensure that the ecology, habitat and processes on our river are not impacted by development.

(e) Financial report

The financial details and statements within this report largely relate to work instructed and completed by the Clerk, Austin Thomson and Parris and McNally (accountants) before the new Clerk was installed in September 2025.

Cash Balance at 31/03/2025 was £5,747.77

As new Clerk, I won't comment on financial matters prior to my installation. My first priority was to collect all outstanding assessments and to date we have ingathered 93.5% of the recoverable arrears. Those accounts remaining unpaid are work in progress and we expect to resolve these issues in due course.

This has immediately improved our cash balance and allowed us to pay our debtors.

Current cash balance on 20/11/2025 stands at £14,775.12

(f) Draft Accounts

These are the accounts for the year ending 31st March 2025

River Girvan Dist. Salmon Fishery Board

Detailed Profit and Loss Account
for the Year Ended 31 March 2025

	31.3.25		31.3.24	
	£	£	£	£
Levies		13,631		13,651
Other income				
Bank Interest		<u>332</u>		<u>695</u>
		13,963		14,346
Expenditure				
Bailiff's Expenses	1,342		1,349	
Bailiff's Telephone	298		243	
Insurance	1147		747	
Sundry expenses	165		137	
Clerks Fees	2,820		2,820	
Accountancy	320		(40)	
ART - Affiliation Fees	9,546		6,546	
ART-Fish Scotland	<u>562</u>		<u>536</u>	
		<u>16,200</u>		<u>12,338</u>
NET PROFIT/(LOSS)		<u>(2,237)</u>		<u>2,008</u>

River Girvan Dist. Salmon Fishery Board

Balance Sheet
31 March 2025

	31.3.25 £	31.3.24 £
CURRENT ASSETS		
Debtors	13,355	28,714
Prepayments	438	374
Bank account no. 1	<u>5,748</u>	<u>17,208</u>
	<u>19,541</u>	<u>46,296</u>
CURRENT LIABILITIES		
Accrued expenses	-	<u>(3,220)</u>
	<u>19,541</u>	<u>43,076</u>
NET ASSETS	<u>19,541</u>	<u>43,076</u>
FINANCED BY		
CAPITAL ACCOUNT		
Brought forward	43,076	41,068
Adj to write off historic Levies	(21,298)	-
Net profit	<u>21,778</u>	<u>2,008</u>
	21,778	43,076
Less		
Net loss	<u>(2,237)</u>	<u>-</u>
	<u>19,541</u>	<u>43,076</u>

5. Bailiff's Report by Thomas Thomson

During the year we had freshets arranged during the number of really hot spells of weather that we had.

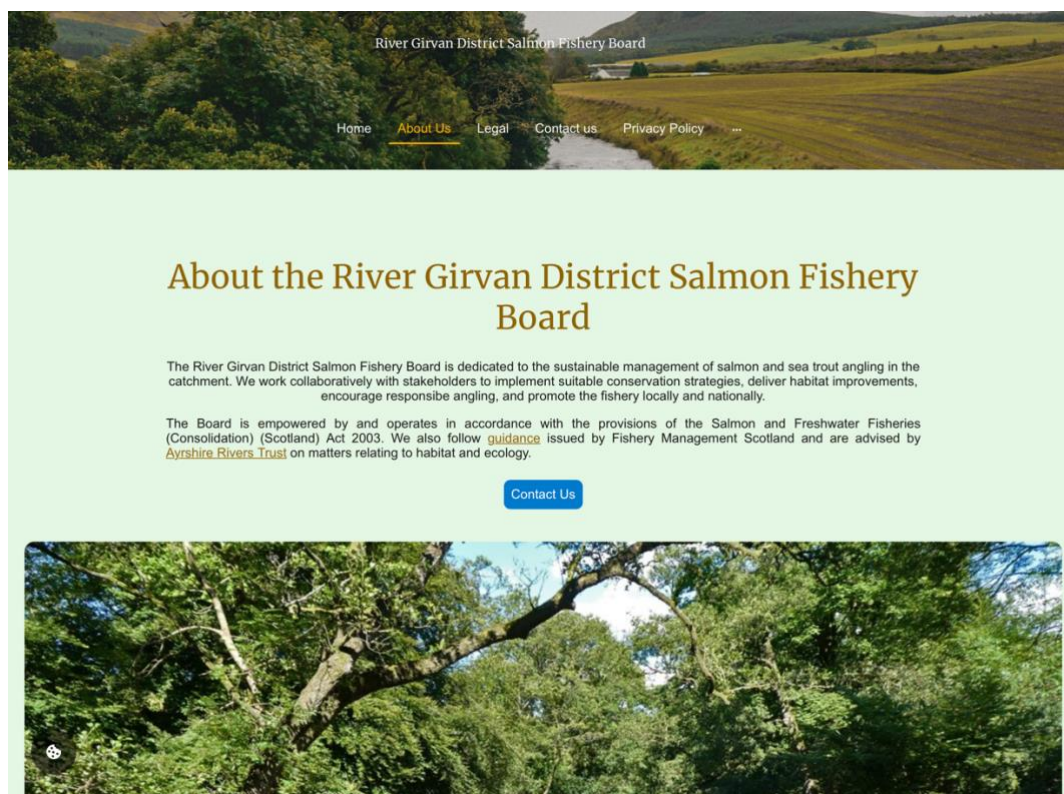
On the 30th of April I had a report of Chinese people netting the sea at Balkenna, south of Turnberry. I contacted the fisheries protection at Ayr. We both attended and found two persons with a net set. When the net was removed it contained a mullet. Both the net and the mullet were confiscated and both people have been reported for the offence.

When we had spates, a good number of fish were seen moving up stream but unfortunately it was the same as it has been for the past few years, a serious lack of angling activity.

Now that the season is over bailiffs will continue to patrol the river until spawning is complete.

6. Website

While the new website has only recently been developed, we thought it important to share as much information as possible in this annual report. We will obviously report on this in much greater detail at the next Annual Report and AGM.



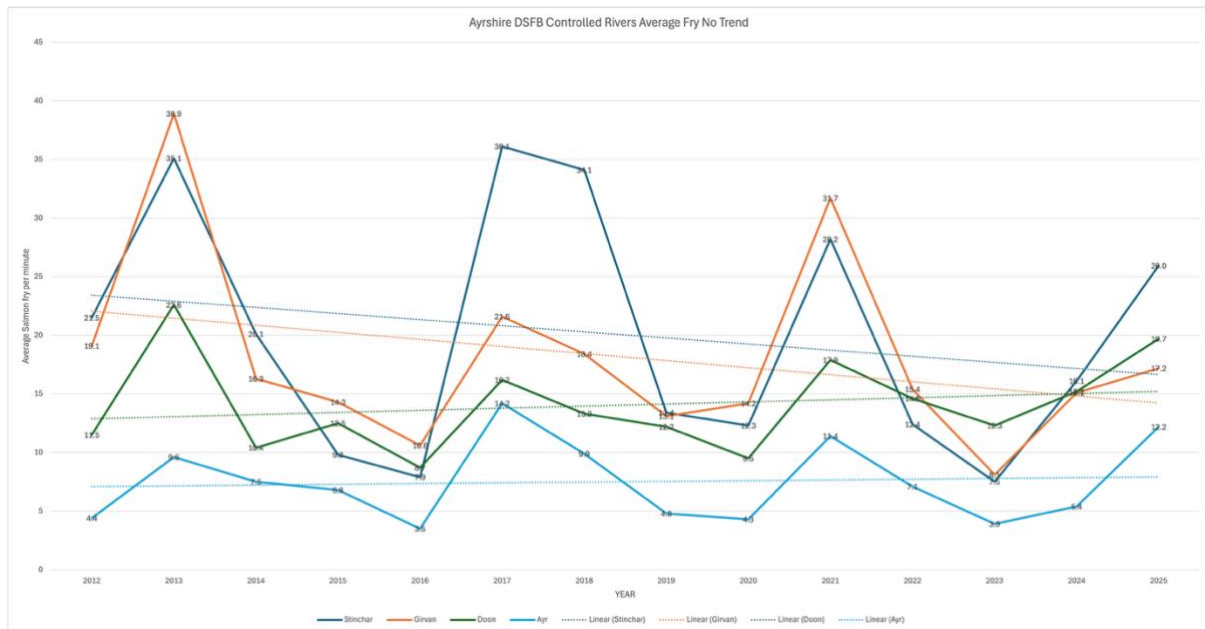
A screenshot from one of the pages on the new River Girvan District Salmon Fishery Board's website

The Clerk will publish calling notices for upcoming meetings and once approved, publish Minutes from those meetings promptly. These documents will be available for public scrutiny and may be downloaded on the 'downloads' page of the site. Making these notices and documents publicly available is a requirement of the Scottish Government.

7. Ayrshire Rivers Trust electrofishing report from Summer 2025 including future priorities

Girvan DSFB AGM Report – 25th November 2025.

Timed Electrofishing Results 2025



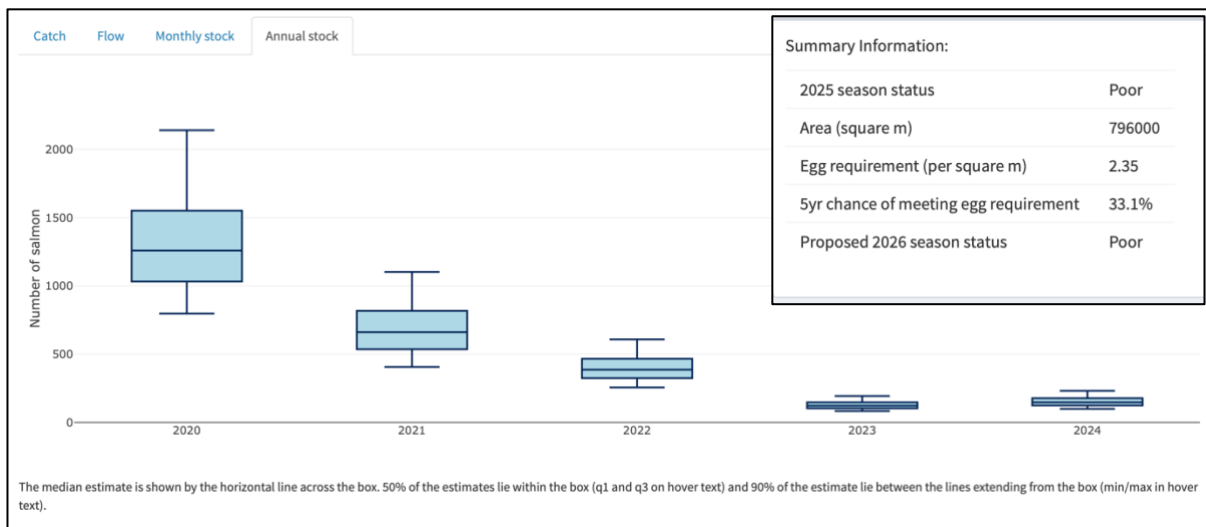
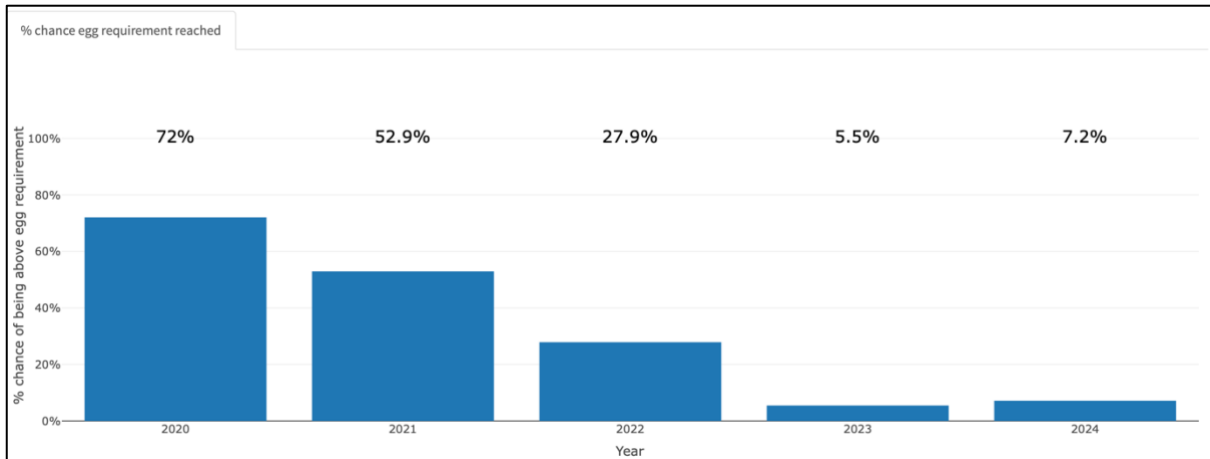
ART undertook the annual timed monitoring of the River Girvan for the Board in the early summer of 2025. These results showed an increase from the 2024 numbers.

When the timed data is analysed, there is a higher number of salmon fry in every fourth year since 2012. 2025 was a good year and with reported catches across Ayrshire generally higher in the 2024 season the expectation was that there would be higher numbers of fry in our rivers in 2025 and this was the case.

River Categorisation

The poor reported catches/rod effort in 2023 really highlights the requirement for accurate reporting and more fishing effort on the river.

The Girvan will remain a category 3/poor grading in 2026.



Much of Marine Scotland’s egg deposition rate model is based on rod catch data, the National Electrofishing Programme for Scotland was designed to be integrated into this system but since its inception in 2018 the delivery of this programme has been sporadic at best. Since 2018 NEPS has run in the 2018, 2019, 2021 and 2023 seasons, with the other 5 years missing sampling. NEPS should have brought in juvenile fish data from across each catchment annually which would have helped improve the accuracy of the stock assessment. With falling catches due to less returning fish and much less angling pressure the Governments assessment of the salmon stocks in the Water of Girvan are in the Trust’s opinion not a true representation of the number of salmon in the Water of Girvan.

Escaped Salmon

In early October 75,000 salmon escaped from a Mowi facility in Loch Linnhe during Storm Amy when one of the pens was damaged. It is reported that these fish had an average weight of 860 grams or 1.9lbs. Whilst we had no direct reports of these fish in our rivers, we did see a report of a fish caught on the lower reaches of the Girvan that was approximately 30cm. Without scale samples it is impossible to verify the origin of this fish but we expect that its origin is farmed. We are speaking to the FMS lead on Wild Salmon Conservation to determine how we monitor any introgression that may occur and how we will fund this work. As the salmon season has closed there is no way of removing any of these fish from the river.

Any reports should be made to ART and through Fishery Management Scotland's Reporting App:

<https://survey123.arcgis.com/share/c3034b1f73b64ec6a16aad9bbc24fc0b>





Ayrshire Rivers Trust

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Water of Girvan Main Stem Salmon Fry Results 2012 - 2025

SITE	LOCATION	Sa/m	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
TGM13	Downstream Girvan Dykes	fry		17.4	1.2	4.4	1.8	5.3	10.2	2.3	9.2	2	0.6	0.2	2	1.4
TGM14	Run below P. Noble	fry	9.6	16.4	0	3.6	9	14.7	0.6	1.3	8	23.2	0	0	4.8	6.6
TGM10	Upstream Cairnhill Farm bridge	fry	11.6	31	5.8	8.2	5.3									
TGM 20	Upstream Cairnhill Farm bridge	fry							10.2	2.7		30.2	4	1	9.6	12.8
TGM11	In Dailly	fry	17.4	56	21.8	17.2	20.2	36	32.4	13.2	15.4	56.4	5	8.8	11.6	17.6
TGM15	Upstream Kilkerran bridge	fry	7.5	29.8		3.8	1	22.2	18.2	14.8		25.4	13.6	2.2	8.2	5.2
TGM17	Garpin Farm	fry	26.4	48.5	26.2	14.8	22.6	15.6	15	10	13.8	36		7.6	21.4	14.2
TGM3/3	Upstream Merkland Bridge	fry	25	64.4	36.2	24.6	14.8	40.6	33.2	42.6	18	49.8	38.4	6	18.6	40.2
TGM9	Straiton Church – across field	fry	24.4	38	18.2	23.2	16.2	33.2	18.8	15.2	24	41.2	32.6	19.2	37.8	26
TGM2	Craigfad Bridge	fry	25.4	42.25	18.8	30	5.2	4								
TGM 19	Upstream Craigfad Bridge	fry							25.6	14	12	33.6	27	19	20.2	22.5
TGM8	Below Tairlaw Bridge	fry	24	45	18.8	12.8	9.8	22.4	19.8	14.6	13.4	19.2	17.2	17	22.8	25.3
MEAN		FRY	19.1	38.9	16.3	14.3	10.6	21.6	18.4	13.1	14.2	31.7	15.4	8.1	15.1	17.2

Kilkerran Gates and Green Engineering Progress

We visited Drumburle Farm in late October to discuss the requirements to be able to exclude the livestock from the riverbank to protect the planted trees and allow the riverbanks to heal. The requirement for water is most necessary in the Spring when the ewes are being fed 'cake' and this increases their requirement for water. Bill indicated that there are two fields without access to water; these are the fields immediately upstream and downstream of Airds Bridge on the left bank. Bill suggested there are water mains from the old kennels on the upstream side of the bridge and that there is a water main to the Gigmagog Cottage downstream of the bridge. If so, then it would be an easy solution to purchase two troughs with low pressure valves and link these into the mains supply of water – this would supply the sheep with year-round drinking water, removing the requirement for the gates to be open. Grazing on the banks would allow control of the rank vegetation and Himalayan balsam at key times of year but would otherwise protect the trees and allow the erosion scars to heal fully.

We can look into funding for this but given the nature of the request it is unlikely that we will be successful on this front – we suggest that either the Estate, tenant farmer, DSFB or a combination of all three fund this work which will ultimately protect the investment of NatureScot, ART, DSFB and Kilkerran Estate.

We are very pleased with how the green engineering that we installed at Drumburle Farm is progressing. This site had approximately 80 metres of sheer, eroding bank which was contributing to decreased water quality and instream habitat. With funding from NatureScot, Girvan DSFB and Kilkerran Estate we reprofiled and engineered the banking into a stable, living riverbank with wonderful biodiversity benefits and we have halted the erosion completely.



Figure 1: The banking prior to any works



Figure 2: The banking immediately after work in September 2023



Figure 3: The banking in early summer 2024



Figure 4: the stabilised banking in autumn 2025

Rod Catches/Rod Effort

We had reports of catches throughout the season where there was angling pressure. Again, the overall poor numbers for the river are symptomatic of a lack of angling effort rather than a lack of fish, this is

also highlighted in the fish numbers observed during electrofishing in 2025 although these fish are the progeny of the 2024 run of salmon.

We would encourage all catch returns to detail the amount of rod effort for the season as is required by Marine Scotland. In time, this data should feed into the modelling for the categorisation.

A full electrofishing report is being prepared and will be issued shortly.

Bailiffing Equipment Fund

Fisheries Management Scotland (FMS) were successful in securing bailiff equipment through the Marine Fund – we discussed with Tommy what equipment would be useful to the Girvan Bailiff Team and lodged this application with FMS. We don't know when the equipment will be purchased and delivered but we will liaise with Tommy and the Board as more information becomes available.

As the Scottish Government have not yet formally publicised the awards, we have been asked not to communicate this beyond our respective teams and DSFBs.

Angling Clubs/Syndicates

At the beginning of the year, we worked with the leader of a new syndicate at Blairquhan to put together permits, maps, rules and regulations (in line with the Boards code of conduct) and offer guidance on the management of the beat with regards to tree pruning/removal and riverbank management. This was gratefully received and something that we are happy to do for any club that needs support or have questions regarding fishery/beat management.

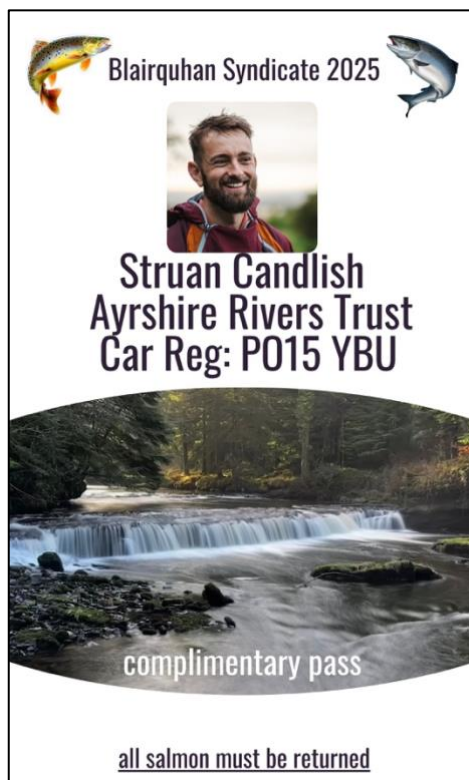


Figure 5: example of a permit for the syndicate



Figure 6: example map of the fishings

Future Work, Funding and Priorities

We continue to look for funding opportunities that will help address priorities across the catchment. There are two Girvan FMPs – the first ART created to help guide and focus work on the catchment prior to Scottish Government funding the online 'story map' version of the management plan which is available at: <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/13f10c2618b5466db829bb8e892bc72d>

For anyone needing a copy of the original and more detailed version of the plan, let us know and we can email you a copy.

Whilst the Board raises a levy to help fund the delivery of work across the catchment, we recognise that this money is often better leveraged as match funding against third party contributions from grant makers and philanthropic organisations.

- One of the biggest priorities is the continuation of the fencing and riverbank restoration from the lower Kilkerran area to Dailly. There are at least three landowners here that would need to be engaged but we see this as being one of the biggest priorities for the mainstem middle river. This would require a large funding package, and we are open to discussion and suggestions from Board members on both the feasibility of this and what other benefits could be achieved for the local communities.
- INNPS control is also a priority for the catchment – we have secured a three year funding package worth £70,000 for the Stinchar catchment to direct more effort into Japanese knotweed control – the Stinchar have helped match fund this project. We could design a similar project for the Girvan if the Board were supportive of this approach. We also recognise the Himalayan balsam is a major issue and we could look securing funding to treat this too. As HB can be controlled by pulling/strimming there is potential for volunteers to undertake much of this work however we appreciate that this takes a lot of effort and there still needs to be a logical strategy to deliver this work in a beneficial way.
- There are many beats that are either not fished or are underfished, and this is to the detriment of the Board and the owners of the river system. We are exploring and talking to clubs from across other catchments who have created easy to use permitting systems to allow anglers to buy day and season tickets digitally. We would encourage all proprietors to think about how they could encourage more people to fish the river as we can see no reason why the Girvan ought not to be as productive as the Doon or Ayr systems.
- One of the quickest ways of improving fish populations is to make inaccessible habitat accessible to fish. The Cloyntie Burn, Capenoch Burn and Baldrennan Burn have barriers that either reduce fish access or prevent fish from accessing habitat entirely. The Girvan has a good range of spawning tributaries all of which should be made as accessible as possible to salmon and trout.
- We would also be very happy to hear suggestions from Board members on where they see potential work priorities for the coming years.