

SLANEY RODFISHERS ASSOCIATION

Dear Member,

It gives me great pleasure to formally invite you to our AGM on Friday 24th April at 07.30 in the Millrace Hotel, Bunclody. All are welcome to attend, both members and non- members alike. We were fortunate enough to enjoy a good run of spring salmon last year and look forward with great anticipation to a similar good run in 2015. Unfortunately the same cannot be said of sea trout numbers, as catches were poor last season and the number of larger fish was much reduced. This poor fishing may have been due to the exceptionally low, warm water and hopefully the coming season will provide much better sea trout catches.

The past year has been one of great activity and major change for the SRT. In November our very active and committed Chairman, Vincent Duigan, was forced to resign at very short notice, due to ill health. I was asked to take over as Chair of the SRT Board, on an interim basis, until our AGM. I'm sure you will join with me in wishing Vincent a return to full health and to thank him for his unstinting efforts on behalf of the wild Atlantic salmon, through his work with the Slaney Trust and the many other organisations he has actively supported over the years. I'm sure as a member of the Slaney Rod Fishers we can count on his advice in relation to the many complex issues we continue to wrestle with on the Slaney.

In March of this year, Commandant Derek Hanley also resigned from the Board. We are very pleased to note that Derek has generously offered to use whatever influence he has, on the headwaters of the river, for the good of the river and its biodiversity, and will continue to facilitate access to the military lands in the vicinity of the headwaters. We also thank Derek for his long service on the Board and his continuing support for our conservation work.

Following a long and arduous process of design and negotiation the Trust submitted a detailed proposal for the building of a rock ramp at Clohamon Weir to Wexford County Council in September of 2014. The Trust had previously objected to an application for a revised hydro-electric scheme design, made by Hogg Enterprises Ltd., in June of last year. Given the complex nature of the planning permission sought by Hogg Enterprises and the differing opinions voiced by a range of interest groups in relation to desirable flow rates over the weir and through the various fish passes, either planned or in place at the weir, it is no wonder that our application for a rock ramp was not successful. It is important to note that at a subsequent meeting with IFI they expressed themselves happy with the overall design of the rock ramp and the smolt / kelt pass, although they had specific recommendations in relation to some aspects of the design. In general, IFI objected to the rock ramp (and the associated smolt / kelt passes) on the basis that the water flows contained in the application were, in their view, inadequate for upstream passage of fish through what is known as the depleted reach.

In this short letter it is not possible to outline the full complexities of the various arguments for and against the insertion of the rock ramp but it is our intention at the AGM to present members with a detailed account of the planning application process and the objections raised as a result of our submission. We will also highlight The Board's recommendations in relation to the next steps required to ensure adequate passage for migratory fish across Clohamon Weir.

The AGM, on the 24th April, will be a critical meeting for the Slaney River Trust. We encourage all members to attend and voice their opinions on the key objectives for the Trust over the coming twelve months and over the years to come. There is no doubt that the issue of the rock ramp and fish passage over Clohamon Weir has proven divisive. It is therefore important that the Trust and its associated groups now regroup, consolidate and move forward as a unified body to press for the conservation and rational management of the salmon and trout stocks in the River Slaney. The Board is of the view that any future work carried out on your behalf by the Board requires the explicit support of the members and on the night of the AGM we will be seeking your support for a set of specific objectives.

As is the norm, there will be a full election of officers on the night of the AGM and again we would encourage members to think carefully about those who might be willing to serve on the Board of the SRT and to put forward suggestions for new Board members.

In addition to agreeing on a way forward in relation to the complex and challenging Clohamon situation, I would suggest that we also need to review and renew our focus on other problems impacting on the stocks of salmon and sea trout in the River Slaney. It is clear from reports received that the ever growing seal populations in the lower river and the estuary, are of major concern. We need to redouble our efforts to convince the appropriate authorities that this problem needs to be quantified and urgent action taken to protect the migratory fish stocks. Other predators are also of concern and we need to encourage census work on both cormorants and mergansers, to again quantify the issues involved and to seek firm but reasonable management actions to reduce the level of predation, particularly on smolts. Other issues concerning the Board relate to water quality, water abstraction and the overall impacts of warmer summers and longer drought conditions, as a result of Climate Change.

As you will have seen from the above we have quite a number of key items to discuss on the night of the AGM and I'm sure airing these issues will lead to a robust and very productive debate. To ensure that we have an orderly and productive meeting could I ask you to present your comments, suggestions or concerns in a clear and succinct manner, and to allow adequate time for all questions to be teased out and fully debated. Looking forward to meeting you on the night of the AGM,

...and most importantly, **Tight Lines for 2015**

Ken Whelan
Chairman (Acting)

Registered Office: Ballybawn Lane, Rathnure, Enniscorthy, Co Wexford
Directors: R. Burgess, D. Dobbs, K. Dodd, T. Mernagh, N. Scott, Dr K. Whelan, D. Ryan
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