

BULLET POINTS FROM TALK GIVEN BY DR. WILLIE ROCHE, INLAND FISHERIES IRELAND, TO THE AGM OF SLANEY RIVER TRUST ON 28 JUNE 2013 – UPDATE ON THE CELTIC SEA TROUT PROJECT (CSTP) AND THE SLANEY CATCHMENT

- Report on the project will be available in autumn 2013. Next year it is hoped to duplicate the project on the west coast which will build on the experience gained from CSTP.
- Cost of CSTP was €2.1m and 75% was funded by Interreg 4A Ireland-Wales 2007-13.
- IFI will organize a major dissemination meeting in the autumn involving all CSTP participants and stakeholders. It will present all of the key findings together.
- A variety of workpackages were undertaken over the course of the project. Sea trout catch statistics from rivers around the Irish Sea (UK and Ireland) were collated and analyzed.
- Climate change: the potential of using sea trout to monitor sea warming was investigated. The 0.6°C rise in sea temperatures in the decade up to 2006 is worrying for sea trout /salmon stocks given that fish are cold blooded.
- Sea trout and brown trout are the same species (*Salmo trutta*) and cannot be distinguished at the juvenile stage. Better feeding at sea means a female sea trout can grow more and faster before returning to freshwater to contribute up to 3000 eggs over its life cycle compared to a resident (“stay at home”) brown trout with a likely contribution of 400 eggs. But the cost of going to sea is the potential for increased predation on sea trout and high energy demands from migration and residing at sea.
- CSTP generated 10,500 tissue samples from potential or known sea trout spawning sites in 100 rivers around the Irish Sea for the genetic baseline data base.
- Almost 1400 adult sea trout samples (including scales) were taken at sea using various methods including shore nets and by experimental trawling. Anglers returned 110 sets of marine caught fish scales.
- It is a commonly held view that sea trout populations are local i.e. they stay close to their river mouth. The genetic study was designed to investigate this. Preliminary results suggest that this may not be strictly true.
- A hydrodynamic model is now being developed to investigate sea trout distribution around the Irish Sea. Incorporating genetic and microchemistry data about individual sea trout will advance understanding of sea trout migration patterns.
- Anglers contributed in excess of 8000 scale samples from rivers all around the Irish Sea. 300 of these came from the Slaney and filled the target set by CSTP.
- Regarding Slaney sea trout the average size was 28cm with a range of 20 to 40 cm.
- Scale reading showed that the population is dominated by finnock (83%). They probably leave the river in the March - May period and return some months later in June / July. The Slaney is a very early fishery and one of the earliest in the country.
- The Slaney has a very different population structure to L. Currane, which has lots of large, older fish in the 50 – 80 cm range.
- The Slaney has some return spawners. Majority of the smolts have spent two years in the river. Slaney finnock growth rate is less than other systems as they spend a short time at sea.
- If the sea trout run is late, as in 2013, it may be water temperature related but no investigations have been carried out.
- IFI would appreciate getting further scale samples so as to keep a record of sea trout catches and stock structures in the Slaney.

- There is a vast amount of information from the CSTP project to be presented in terms of stock inventories (based on catch data, genetics, comprehensive life history and marine ecology data, assessment of the potential of changes in sea trout growth as indicators of climate change, microchemistry) and other aspects of sea trout ecology and matters relating to management. All of this information will contribute to better understanding and management of a fascinating and undervalued resource.