

# SLANEY RIVER TRUST

Registered Charity No. (RCN) 20063214 CHY 17141

19<sup>th</sup> June 2026

Dear Members,

I would like to apologise for the later than usual notice of our AGM this year which will be held on Friday 10<sup>th</sup> of July at Redmonds', Bunclody at 7.30 pm.

We had initially intended to hold the AGM prior to the traditional opening day of 17 March, and subsequently in advance of the delayed opening date of June 1<sup>st</sup> once the 2026 regulations were finally published. However, the decision was ultimately made to postpone the AGM until early June as we hoped to provide our members with a positive update on the development of a mitigation strategy for the long-standing issues at Clohamon weir at the meeting. While this development process is currently at a critical juncture, IFI have missed several deadlines relating to the project, and we cannot postpone the AGM any further.

Access to the AGM will be available online for those of you that cannot attend in person, and we will send a meeting link to all SRT members in the near future.

As you know, the salmon angling regulations for 2026, which were not finalised until April, prohibited any angling for salmon on the Slaney until the first of June. While we appreciate the challenges facing salmon stocks nationally, the Slaney River Trust is extremely disappointed that the Slaney remained closed to all salmon angling until June despite our best efforts to secure an earlier opening. The Trust remains highly supportive of catch-and-release angling. Extensive research has demonstrated that properly conducted fly fishing using barbless hooks results in minimal mortality for salmon. Against this background, we believe that law-abiding catch-and-release anglers play a crucial role in deterring and reporting poachers as well as identifying environmental issues. Without legal angling activity, the Slaney and its fish lose these essential protections.

During the public consultation period, the Slaney River Trust made two detailed submissions to Minister Dooley outlining the importance of maintaining a legal angling presence on the Slaney throughout the traditional angling season and highlighting the conservation benefits associated with responsible catch-and-release angling. We are frustrated that these submissions were not reflected in the final regulations.

As we all know, salmon populations across Ireland are in a state of serious decline, with the River Slaney stock having experienced a particularly severe reduction in recent years. Only 72 rivers are open to salmon angling in 2026 and the Slaney continues to fail to meet its conservation limit. Against this backdrop, a satisfactory resolution to the ecological damage caused by the Clohamon Weir barrier and turbines must be regarded as a matter of the utmost urgency.

The mitigation of the Clohamon barrier remains one of the SRT's highest priorities. We are utterly disappointed that, despite many years of lobbying, research, and engagement, the barrier continues to impact our unique salmon population. Against this background, the SRT submitted a formal letter to the Chairman of the IFI Board in June 2025, arguing that resolution of the fish passage issues at Clohamon is not only a matter of the utmost urgency for our declining salmon population, but also a legal requirement under the EU Habitats Directive. This

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intervention led to the production of an internal IFI Options and Feasibility Paper examining potential mitigation measures at Clohamon.

Given our longstanding efforts to resolve the issues at Clohamon, the SRT subsequently produced and submitted an independent Options and Feasibility Paper to ensure that all potential solutions were considered and properly assessed. IFI has since commissioned a full assessment of mitigation options from an external consultancy, which, in conjunction with our own submission and coordination with key stakeholders, is currently being used to settle on a definitive mitigation strategy. While we eagerly look forward to providing our members with a meaningful update on the developments at Clohamon, negotiations are currently ongoing and it unfortunately appears unlikely that we will be in a position to present a finalised mitigation strategy at the AGM.

While Clohamon remains our most pressing concern, it is important to recognise that there are now 198 confirmed barriers throughout the Slaney catchment. The catchment has been prioritised under the National Barrier Mitigation Programme, presenting a significant opportunity to improve river connectivity for migratory fish.

The SRT submitted several barrier mitigation applications to the National Barrier Mitigation Programme during 2025. As a result, a mitigation plan is currently being developed for Tullow Weir together with a further 16 barriers across the Slaney system. We intend to submit additional applications in September 2026 to progress mitigation measures for further priority barriers within the catchment. If SRT members have insights into the locations of barriers that should be addressed as a top priority, please get in contact with the SRT Project Officer, Ross Finlay, at [rofinlay@tcd.ie](mailto:rofinlay@tcd.ie).

We are delighted to report that LAWPRO recently awarded the SRT €42,700 under the Catchment Support Fund to support an ambitious programme of work over the coming year. This funding will help us modernise the organisation, increase barrier mitigation efforts to improve connectivity, pursue opportunities for river and riparian habitat restoration, restore spawning beds, enhance water quality and increase public awareness of the challenges facing the Slaney and its salmon population. If you have any suggestions, observations, or concerns regarding the Slaney River that you believe should be brought to our attention, please contact Ross.

A major priority for the SRT going forward is the restoration and enhancement of in-stream and spawning habitat. We are currently working towards a collaborative project with Inland Fisheries Ireland aimed at commencing restoration works on important spawning streams, alongside planned restoration of spawning habitat within the main channel of the river itself. This has the potential to deliver significant benefits for both salmon and sea trout populations and represents one of the most positive developments currently under discussion. Again, we would ask SRT members to contact Ross Finlay at the email address above with the locations of damaged, drained, or modified channels in the Slaney River system that would benefit from restoration works.

The SRT continues to engage actively with a wide range of stakeholders across the catchment. We are represented on the Slaney Catchment Community Forum by Board member and renowned fisheries scientist

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Professor Ken Whelan. The Forum is one of five pilot river catchment projects established under Ireland's new River Basin Management Plan to strengthen public participation in catchment management.

During December 2025, the SRT hosted members of the Forum on a visit to observe salmon spawning activity in the Glen of Imaal. We also delivered an Introduction to Stream Ecology event in Rathvilly as part of Water Heritage Day 2025, an event which we intend to repeat in 2026. Through initiatives such as these, we hope to ensure that the protection and restoration of the Slaney salmon population become a priority not only for the Forum but for the wider community throughout the catchment.

Earlier this year, the SRT was pleased to host Mark Bilsby, Chief Executive Officer of the Atlantic Salmon Trust, and Alison Baker, Restoration Director, on a visit to the Slaney River. Discussions focused on restoration strategies, barrier mitigation options, potential legal routes to achieving barrier mitigation goals at Clohamon, and the possibility of future collaboration between the Atlantic Salmon Trust and the Slaney River Trust.

The SRT also assisted Baltinglass Tidy Towns in initiating an eradication programme for the highly invasive Himalayan Balsam along the banks of the Slaney during 2025. Now entering its second year, the project has received more than €30,000 in LAWPRO support and has significant potential to be expanded downstream throughout the river system.

While there are many challenges facing the Slaney River and its salmon population, there are also genuine opportunities for progress. Through continued engagement, science-based restoration, barrier mitigation and the support of our members, we will continue to advocate for the protection and recovery of this remarkable river.

Thank you for your continued support of the Slaney River Trust. Your membership, participation and commitment will play a crucial role as we embark on an ambitious plan to help restore the Slaney and its salmon over the coming years.

Due to financial support from The Rivers Trust and LAWPRO, the SRT has become less reliant on membership fees. This has allowed us to reduce the cost of membership to €25. We are actively looking to expand the activities and influence of the SRT within the Slaney Catchment and hope that this reduction in membership fee helps expand our membership and thereby increase our ability to drive positive environmental changes.

By joining the SRT you will be covered under our Public Liability and Personal Accident Insurance cover, details of which can be found on our website. You will also be emailed a password for the River Cam. Payment can be made via the PayPal link on the SRT website or via bank transfer using the Slaney Rod Fishers Current Account details on our website.

Please also note the annual Slaney River Trust and Slaney Rodfishers accounts have been prepared and are available to view on our website.

I look forward to meeting many of you at the AGM and discussing these important matters in greater detail.

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Yours sincerely,

Colin White

Chairman

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