

Mr. Stephen Walsh
Head of Department, Recreation & Amenity Department
Galway City Council
City Hall
College Road
Galway

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Galway City Draft Biodiversity Action Plan 2013 - 2023

Dear Mr Walsh

Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) is the state body responsible for the protection, management and conservation of the fisheries resource. Under the provisions of the Fisheries Acts, the Local Government (Water Pollution) Acts and associated legislation, IFI has been assigned specific responsibilities relating to the protection of fish species, water and habitat quality. Having reviewed the Galway City draft Biodiversity Action Plan 2013 – 2023, IFI would like make the following observations:

- **Threats to Biodiversity**

Invasive species

Non-native invasives are species that have been introduced, generally by human intervention, outside their natural range and whose establishment and spread can threaten native ecosystems. Invasive species represent one of the greatest threats to biodiversity, second only to that caused by direct habitat destruction. They do this by competitively excluding or out-competing our less robust native species, by preying on native species or by altering the natural aquatic or riparian habitat in which they reside.

Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS), fish parasites and diseases are readily transferred from one watercourse to another on angling tackle, boats and protective clothing. These can be very damaging to resident fish stocks, the aquatic habitat and the general environment. They can also adversely impact the recreational and amenity use of infested watercourses, and hence tourism, by restricting angling, boating, swimming and other water-based leisure pursuits.



Zebra Mussels (*Dreissena polymorpha*)

When concerns arose in relation to the zebra mussel, IFI erected signage at all key boat access points as part of a sustained campaign by the Western Zebra Mussel Control Initiative. See www.alienspecies.ie, currently the zebra mussel has infested all of the Moycullen area coarse angling lakes, Lough Mask, Lough Corrib and the species have recently been detected on the River Corrib at the Galway Fishery.



Zebra mussel (*Dreissena polymorpha*) colonisation along the River Corrib at the Galway Fishery.

Non-aquatic invasive species

It should also be noted that there are non-aquatic invasive species that affect riparian zones and threaten native plants and animals by forming dense thickets. These include the giant hogweed, rhododendron, and the Japanese knotweed, a plant species that is already present within the Corrib catchment. A local management plan is required to eradicate the threats posed by these species.



Japanese knotweed (*Fallopia japonica*) along the Lower River Corrib.

- **Biosecurity**

Biosecurity is of the utmost importance given the presence of highly invasive plant Curly Waterweed (*Lagarosiphon major*) in the Upper Corrib catchment. It is crucial that appropriate steps are undertaken to ensure that the species does not spread to the Lower Corrib catchment and that the lake does not act as a source of infestation for other waters throughout the region. Progress is being made in relation to the control and spread of *Lagarosiphon major* but the zebra mussel is continuing to extend its range throughout

the catchment. Funding to continue the control programme for *Lagarosiphon major* on Lough Corrib is urgently required if we are to reduce far greater future pressures and costs resulting from the spread of these invasive species.

There are a number of retail establishments within the local area that have been known to sell invasive non-native aquatic plants. The public need to be made aware of the potential threat posed to local watercourses through the disposal of such plants and the release of unwanted exotic pets into the local environment.

Inland Fisheries Ireland currently operates two biosecurity protocols. One relates to the 'Disinfection of Angling Equipment' and the other describes procedures for the 'Disinfection of Boats and Boating Equipment'. These protocols detail the correct procedures that should be taken to disinfect fishing tackle or equipment that could act as a vector in the spread of invasive species or harmful fish pathogens within our watercourses.

Though not yet reported from Ireland, *Gyrodactylus salasris*, an ectoparasitic gill fluke represents a very serious threat to our wild salmon stocks nationally. The biosecurity measures being implemented by IFI will help to prevent the introduction of this highly dangerous and pathogenic salmon ectoparasite which has, in the past, decimated wild salmon stocks elsewhere in northern Europe.



Disinfectant mat & dip at Galway Fishery.

- **Protected Species**

In addition to salmonids, the River Corrib also has a population of sea and brook lamprey which are listed on Annex II of the EU Habitats Directive. IFI staff have also observed bat species in the vicinity of Galway's Salmon Weir Bridge at dusk along with the occasional sighting of otters feeding on salmonids along the River Corrib at the Galway Fishery.

These species are protected under the Habitat's Directive wherever they occur, not just in SAC's or NHA's. The Water Framework Directive requires that the ecological status of all waters is conserved and prevents any deterioration in ecological status, including any loss of habitat. Development proposals in Galway City which are in proximity to SACs, SPAs will need assessments appropriate to their location.

- **Education & Awareness Programmes**

Fisheries Awareness Week

Fisheries Awareness Week runs each year in early summer. Its main aims are to encourage adults and children alike who may never have fished before to take up a new hobby. To achieve this aim IFI works with angling clubs and organisations to promote all types of angling. IFI also uses this platform to promote its role in protecting and conserving our fisheries resource. More at www.faw.ie

Something Fishy

The Something Fishy education programme is delivered to over 100 schools nationwide each year. 'Something Fishy' is aimed at fifth and sixth classes at primary level for pupils to explore different aspects of fish life for example, biodiversity, water quality, the life cycle of salmon, fish stocks, angling, conservation of rivers and lakes and the role of fish as part of the food chain. It is an activity-based educational resource and is designed to be interesting and attractive to both teachers and students. A key element of the programme is that it promotes learning about fish and the environment in a local context. More at www.somethingfishy.ie.

IFI Invasive Species App



Inland Fisheries Ireland's new smart phone app is now available to download from the Google Play and iTunes App stores. The easy to use and readily accessible 'IFI - Invasive Species' app will aid users in the identification of invasive species and permit them to take geo referenced photographs that will immediately be uploaded to the IFI server. The information so received will be reviewed, uploaded onto the IFI species database and, if the sighting is of something new or particularly worrying, will trigger an immediate on-site survey by IFI staff.

IFI would recommend that the new plan include measures to prevent the spread of both aquatic and non-aquatic invasive species. IFI looks forward to reviewing the final draft of the Galway City Local Biodiversity Action Plan 2013-2023 in due course.

Yours sincerely

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