

Submission to Heritage Ireland 2030 from Traditional Net Fishers Steering Group on the Preservation of Ireland's Heritage Net Fisheries

A public consultation for Heritage Ireland 2030, Ireland's national heritage plan is currently underway.

Background

Since the time of first human settlement in Ireland, our relationship with our inland waterways and seas has remained an integral part of our rich cultural identity. According to authors of BiblioMara (2004), this relationship has 'derived from natural, social, economic and cultural influences'. It includes tangible and intangible interactions such as seaweed farms, foraging, fish traps, weirs and traditional net fisheries for species such as salmon, sea trout and eel.

In recent years, the introduction of the Salmon Hardship Scheme in 2006, the eel fishing ban implemented from 2009 and a decline in fish stocks in our inland lakes and rivers has led to the closure and suspension of many of our traditional net fisheries. The loss of these traditional net fisheries to the areas that they supported was much regretted by fishers and their families. Many eel fishers believe that the closure of the eel fishery, has placed them in poverty, but the fact that their rich cultural heritage, traditions and knowledge is being overlooked appears to signal that maritime heritage is not considered in decision making. Many salmon and sea trout net fishers believe that the move to a single stock assessment model could be further enhanced and developed, with the input of all stakeholders, to ensure substantiable fisheries exist in the future.

Traditional net fisheries have other values other than to the economic and recreational value to the communities that are associated with them. A survey conducted in 2004 by the Environment Agency in the UK has demonstrated that such fisheries were deemed to have a heritage value, not dependent on the catch or the number of people fishing. A strong argument was also made that through demonstrations, interpretative material and educational opportunities had the potential to enhance local economies through tourism. For example, 'the

estimated value placed on the River Severn estuary fisheries by households within the Environment Agency Midlands region, Thames West area and North Wessex [was] £5.3m’.

In Ireland, the growing role of heritage continues to play an important part in local communities, and it is unsurprising that 93 per cent of respondents to a survey conducted by the Heritage Council (2015) stated that our heritage should be protected. Much of our coastal and maritime heritage has been bolstered through ongoing initiatives such as the Wild Atlantic Way, Ireland’s Ancient East, CHERISH Project and the HERICOAST Project. However, much more is required in order to ensure that our now threatened net fisheries are afforded special protection for the continuance of these living heritage traditions into the future. We feel that this can be best achieved by including the following actions in Heritage Ireland 2030:

ACTIONS

- 1. Support the designation of ‘heritage fishery’ status for eel, salmon and sea trout fishers seeking to preserve and develop sustainable heritage net fisheries in our rivers and estuaries in conjunction with statutory bodies and other key stakeholders. Thus insuring that our ‘living heritage’ is secured for future preservations.**
- 2. Work with net fishers and key stakeholders to protect, conserve and develop key aspects of heritage associated with heritage net fisheries e.g. traditional boats, skills, customs, placenames and nomenclature through:**
 - Educational opportunities and research**
 - Demonstrations and experience/ open days**
 - Artisan food tourism**

NOTES:

Heritage net fisheries refer to the traditional net fisheries (draft, snap, loop and others) fished by eel, salmon and seatrout fishermen in Ireland’s river and estuaries.

These actions in no way support the reopening of mixed stock fisheries at sea.

Traditional heritage net fishers are strongly encouraged to sign a copy of this petition or compile their own to be submitted as part of the Heritage Ireland 2030 public consultation process (details at bottom of submission).

Written submissions can be sent via email to heritageireland2030@chg.gov.ie or posted to:

Heritage Ireland 2030

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