# River Findhorn sea trout catch data

## 1. River Findhorn Marine Scotland Catch Data

The catch return data collected by the Scottish government via Marine Scotland (previously Fisheries Research Services) is essential data in monitoring our sea trout catches and stocks. This is the only consistent and long time series set of sea trout data available. Catch rates can vary greatly with fishing effort, run timing, environmental conditions and can often be inaccurate due to misreporting of catch figures. As a result the specific value for a given year or month may be inaccurate but given the time scale and size of this catch data set the overall trends are likely to reflect the underlying trends in sea trout abundance within the rivers. This catch data is protected by Crown copyright, used with the permission of Marine Scotland Science (MSS), Aberdeen. MSS is not responsible for interpretation of these data by third parties

The Findhorn sea trout catch has always been relatively low only peaking above 500 fish in a year once since 1952 (Figure 1). As result the Findhorn is not know for sea trout compared to the more prevalent salmon. The catch returns have peaked and troughed every 10 years. They were especially low in the 1950s before increasing in the 1960s, falling back in the 1970s and then peaking again in the 1980s. They then fell back in the early 1990s before building again until 2001 and since have fallen away again. The long term average is only 219 sea trout per year from 1952-2001 but this has now fallen by 32% to an average of 150 for the 10 years from 2002-2011. Catch and release of sea trout on the Findhorn has been increasing since it was first recorded in 1994 and in 2011 accounted for 74% of sea trout caught. The finnock proportion of the catch has been significant since FRS first started recording them in the returns in 2004. It is important to note that that prior to 2004 finnock were not included in the returns and that finnock catches have actually been declining significantly according to Forres Angling Association data (Figure 4). Finnock have been a significant part of the catch on the Findhorn likely supported by the sheltered and prevalent feeding grounds of Findhorn Bay.

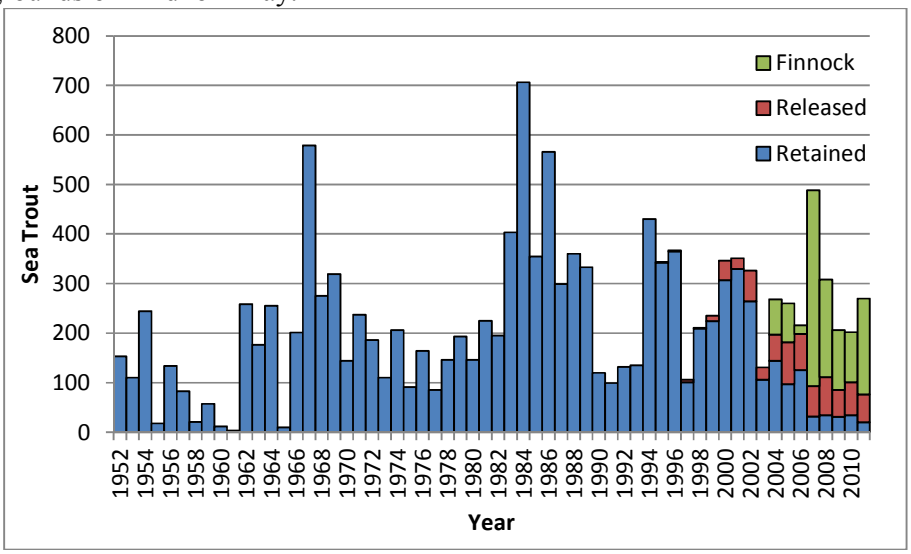


**Figure 1, Findhorn Rod & Line catch data 1952-2011. Sea trout Retained and Released, and finnock**

The Findhorn also supported a productive net fishery for sea trout until it closed in 1993. The netting fishery took far more fish than the rod and line fishery on average taking 1360 sea trout per year (see Figure 2) until the fishery closed in 1992.

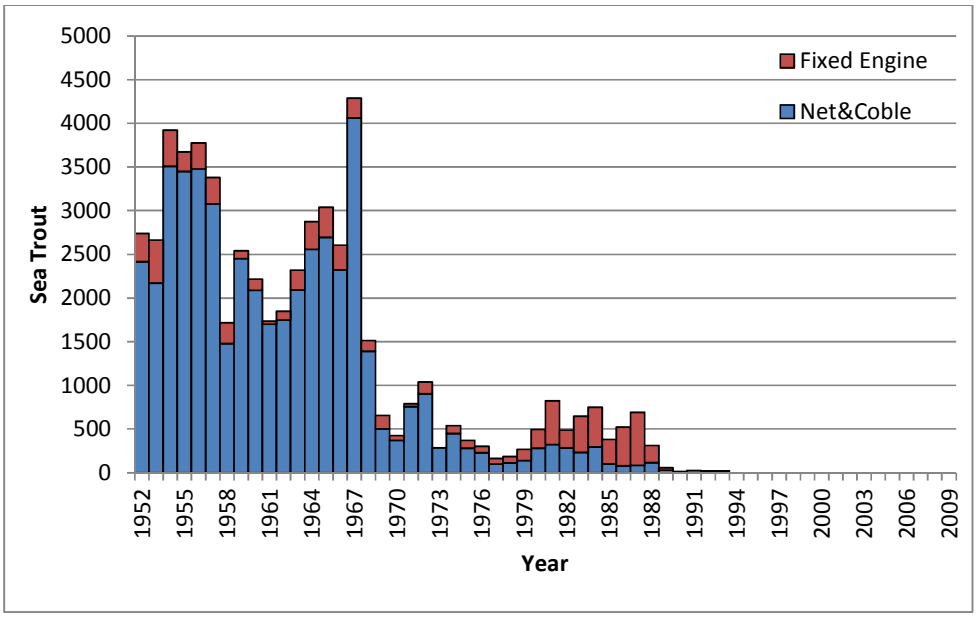


**Figure 2 Findhorn sea trout netting catch returns (1952-2009) for Net & Coble and Fixed Engine Methods**

## 2. Forres Angling Association Data

The Forres Angling Association has kindly donated their annual catch records to the MFSTP and are summarised in Figure 3 along aside the Findhorn District annual returns. It is clear from Figure 3 that the Forres Club is responsible for the majority of the sea trout caught on the Findhorn although there has been a decline in the proportion caught by the Club in recent years. In 2006 and 2009 the club recorded no sea trout which is a severe fall from the long term average of 179 sea trout per year and a peak of 594 sea trout in 1984.

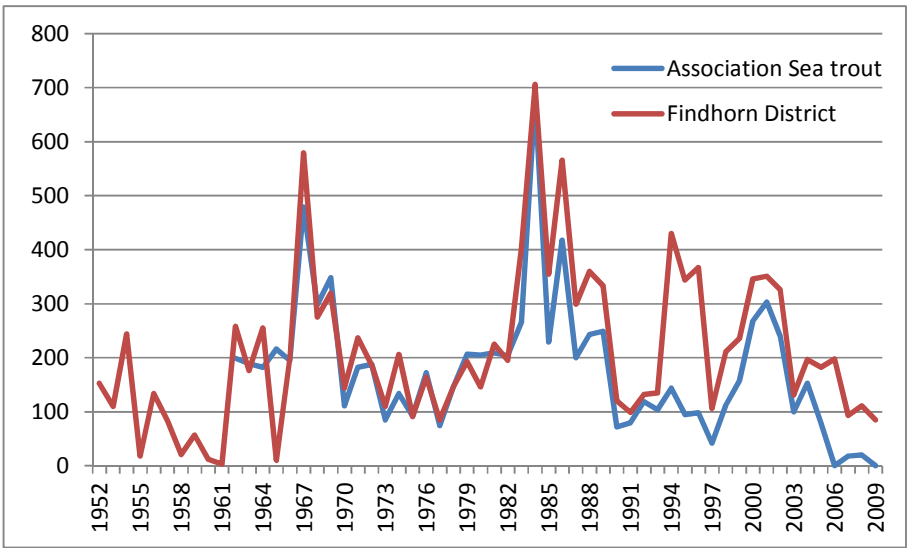


**Figure 3 Forres AA annual sea trout returns compared to the Findhorn District returns**

The Forres Angling association also helpfully supplied their annual catch returns for Finnock and are shown in Figure 4. Finnock are sea trout returning to the river in the same year as their first migration and a very important component of future generations of sea trout. The severe decline shown in Figure 4 is of key concern to the Findhorn sea trout population. The exact cause of this decline is unknown but is has been suggested that changes in the prey itme available in Findhorn Bay may have limited the potential for Finnock.

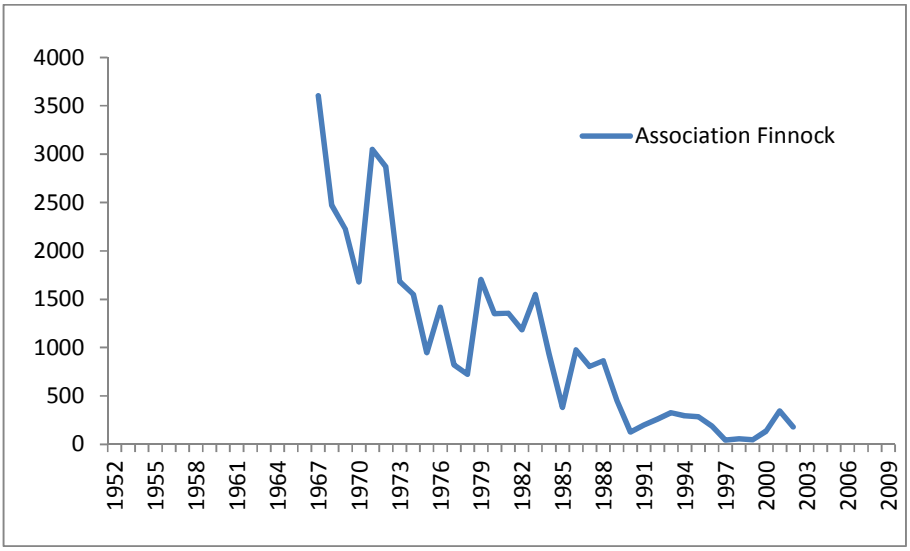


**Figure 4, Forres AA Finnock Catch Returns**

### 1.1. Monthly Catch Data

**The MFSTP has obtained the monthly sea trout catch figures from the Scottish Governments records (Marine Scotland Science) for the Findhorn 1952-2009.** Figure 5 shows the average monthly rod and line catch of sea trout for 10 year periods from 1952-2009. Apart for the period 1962-1971 the timing of the fishery has not changed significantly over time despite changes in overall catch rates. The fishery typically starts in January and February slowly reaching a peak in June July or August before gradually declining towards the end of the season in October. During the period 1962-1972 there was a very different pattern with catches rapidly increasing to a peak in May before declining. The Lossie also showed a uncharacteristic peak in sea trout catches in May over that same 10 year period. It is worth noting that although there have been no significant changes in timing on the Findhorn other rivers have shown significant changes in the timing of the peak fishing season.

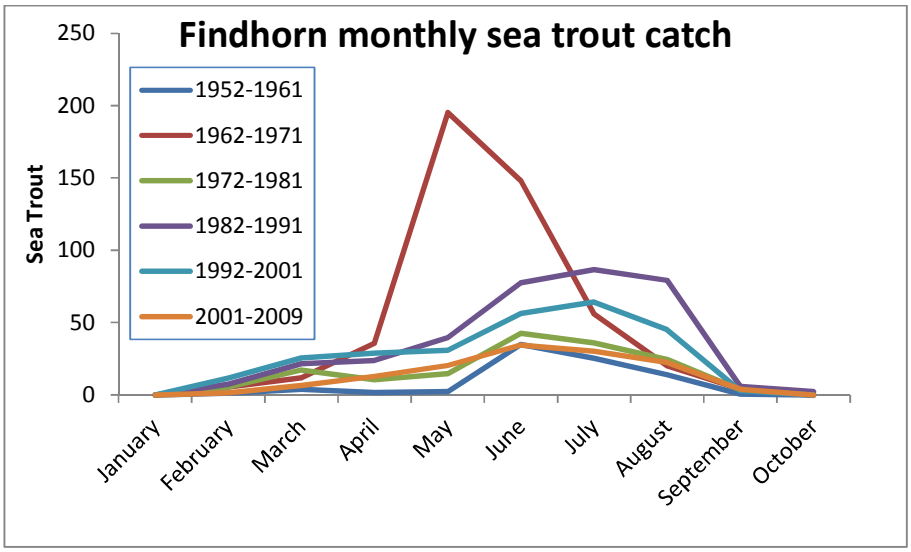


**Figure 5, Average monthly sea trout catch on the Findhorn (1952-2009) for 10 year periods**