

River Nairn sea trout catch data

1. River Nairn Marine Scotland sea trout 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 and 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.

Sea trout catches on the River Nairn have always been relatively low, rarely increasing above 250 sea trout per year (Figure 1). The pattern of historical catches is similar to the Findhorn with catches falling in the 1950s before increasing in the late 1960s and falling again in the mid 1970s. Numbers then built to a peak in 1995 before beginning an overall downward trend. The long term average annual sea trout catch for the Nairn from 1952-2001 is 144 and this has fallen by 15% to a 10 year average from 2002-2011 of 123 sea trout per year. The catch and return of sea trout has been increasing since it was first recorded in 1994 building up to a very significant 94% of the sea trout in 2009 before falling back slightly to 85% in 2011. This has been driven by the 100% catch and release policy adopted by the Nairn District Salmon Fishery Board in response to steeply falling catches. Finnock are rarely recorded as being caught on the Nairn.

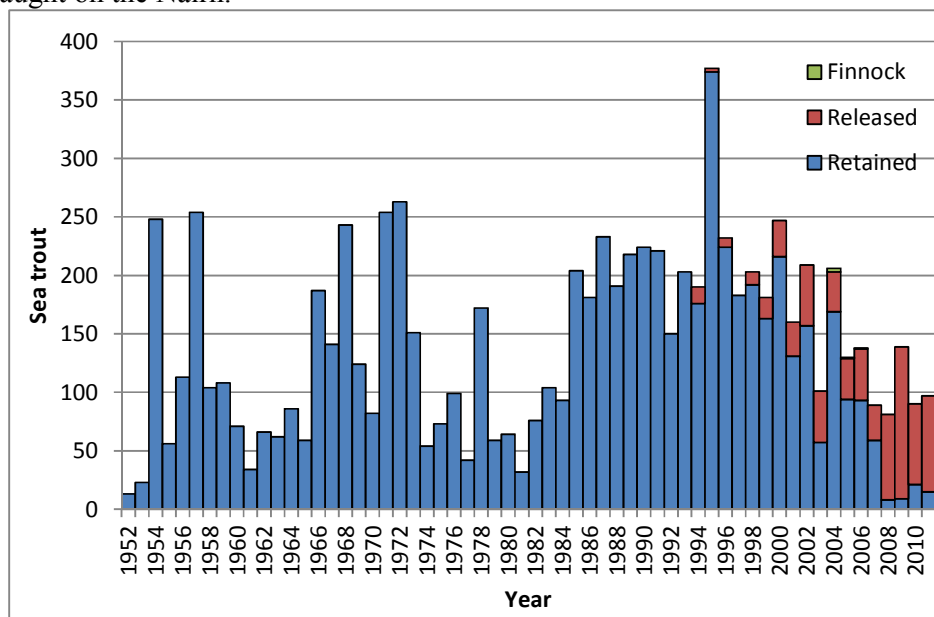


Figure 1, Nairn Rod & Line catch data 1952-2011. Sea trout Retained and Released, and finnock

The Nairn also supported a Fixed Engine net fishery which closed in 1985. The net fishery took a similar number of fish to the Rod and Line fishery on average 187 per year (Figure 2). Unlike other

rivers there appears to have been an increase in the rod and line in the years after the nets were removed.

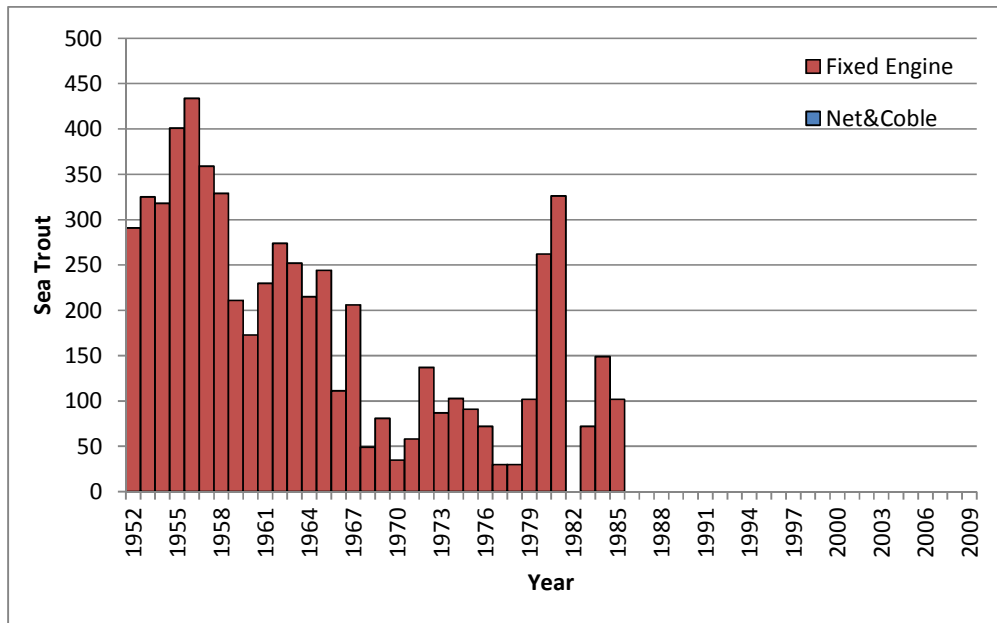


Figure 2, River Nairn Netting catch

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 Nairn 1952-2009. Figure 3 shows the average monthly rod and line catch of sea trout for 10 year periods from 1952-2009. The timing of the Nairn Sea trout fishery has shown some interesting changes. Typically starting in January and February the fishery gradually increases through the spring and in 1952-61 peaked in June and July while from 1962-1991 peaked in August but since then has returned to peaking in June and July. The period 1992-2001 really stands out with catches May, June and July far exceeding historical or modern catches for those months. Many of the periods graphed also suggest a lag in catches in May with catch rate not increasing that much from April and for 1962-71 and 1971-82 actually declining. It is worth noting that there is more variation shown in the timing of Nairn catch rates compared to most other Moray Firth rivers.

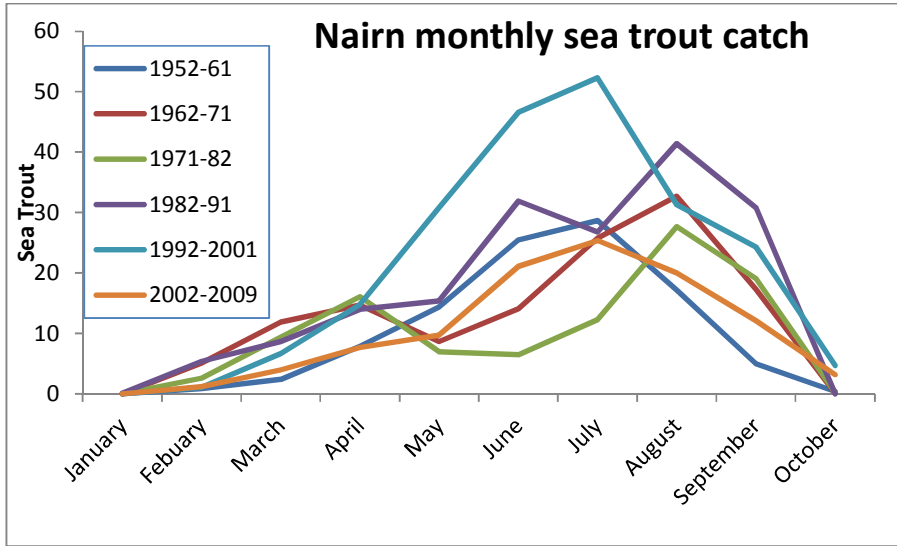


Figure 3, Nairn monthly sea trout catch 1952-2009