

Managers Report on Season 2025 to the Helmsdale DSFB Annual Meeting on 16th May 2026.

2025 reported catch was 365, totalling 400 including Lower Helmsdale and private beat water catches. By any measure an appalling year. 2020 recorded a catch of 865 which was the next worse. The context was that 2025 was the driest season in living memory. This was the case on most Scottish rivers and even in large eastern North American rivers where parts of the river-bed were visible for the first time. The Helmsdale catch was nonetheless better than all comparable rivers in the north Highlands.

In addition heaping insult upon injury the fish counter suffered a lightning strike and was out of action for a key part of the grilse run. Grilse started to arrive at the start of June.

The spawning last November was only visible to observers on a few days. Water was mostly high and turbid. Spawners were seen higher up the tributaries than normal moving further inland on the tributaries in spite. The water scarcity of the season had turned into continual rainfall for well over a month.

Electrofishing was done on 30 plus sites with results showing the effects of the washout late in 2024. Some numbers were normal but many were lower. Electro fishing was made easier, more accurate and quicker with the aid of new equipment supplied by the Scottish Government.

The hatchery programme continued with the capture of 56 suitable broodstock. The number of salmon ova stripped was 150,000, the usual number. The eggs however were slightly smaller than normal and some of the broodstock were also slightly smaller. Scientist Alan Youngson, formerly head of Marine Scotland, said this was explicable and that no special importance should be attached to it, provided it was not repeated for years in succession. 2025 was the first time in the 10 year DNA programme in partnership with UHI that part of the natural run is proven to be of hatchery origin.

The Board acquired a sawbill license for 3 mergansers and this quota was completed. 3 sawbill counts conducted by the bailiffs in October, February, and March supported this license.

With regard to the statutory obligations relating to 'good governance' placed on the Board under the Salmon and Freshwater Fishery (Consolidation) (Scotland) Act 2023, as amended, these have been complied with as follows:

1. Annual accounts are published on our website and intimated to Scottish Ministers.
2. Annual public meetings of both the Qualified Proprietors and the District Salmon Fishery Board are advertised with corresponding Minutes published on our website and intimated to Scottish Ministers.

A complaints register is Maintained. No Complaints were received in 2025.

A Register of Members Interests is maintained and published on our website.

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