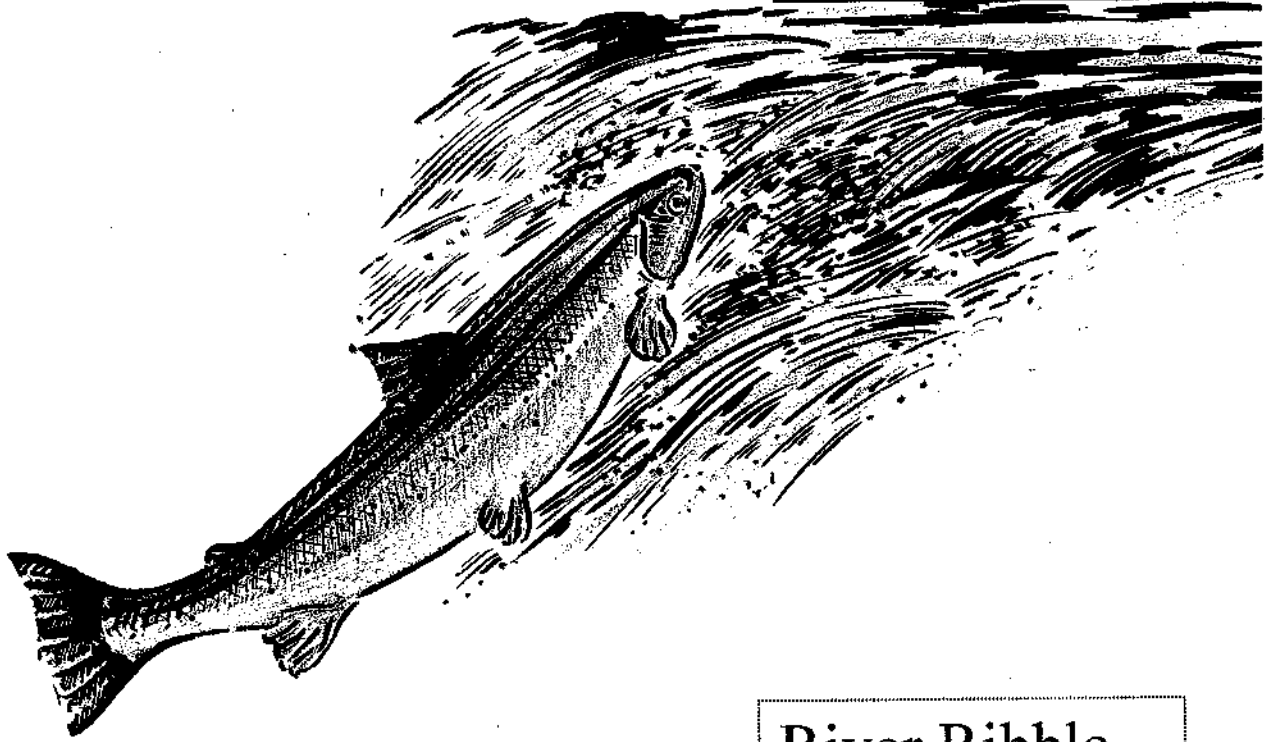


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# SALMON Action Plan



River Ribble

June 2000



ENVIRONMENT  
AGENCY

# RIVER RIBBLE SALMON ACTION PLAN

June 2000

## Contents

Section	Page
Summary	i
1. Introduction	1
2. Public Consultation	3
3. Action Plan Summary	5
4. Management of the Plan	10
Appendix	11

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## Summary

1. In February 1996 "A Strategy for the Management of Salmon in England and Wales" was launched by the National Rivers Authority setting out objectives for the management of salmon fisheries.
2. These objectives are to be met through local Salmon Action Plans which are to be produced for each of the principle salmon rivers in England and Wales by the year 2001.
3. A consultation report was produced for the River Ribble and released publicly in October 1999. This document:
  - \* Determined an egg deposition figure of 8.5 million eggs for the Ribble, that would allow maximum gain from the net and rod fisheries;
  - \* Raised a number of issues which are thought to currently limit salmon production;
  - \* Identified actions which may be undertaken by the Environment Agency and other bodies to improve stocks.
4. Over two hundred copies of the consultation report were circulated to interested parties and 9 responses were received offering useful comments on the document.
5. This document re-addresses the issues raised in the consultation document, taking into account the comments received, and also identifies areas of possible improvement in data gathering that would allow more accurate estimation of the spawning target and compliance in future years.
6. Some of the major issues addressed in the plan are:
  - \* The impact of farming practices, including bank erosion, land drainage and pyrethroid sheep dips;
  - \* The impact of in-river obstructions;
  - \* The impact of low flows caused by abstraction, particularly in the Hodder system;
  - \* Possible over-exploitation of the stocks by rods, nets and high seas fisheries;
  - \* Reduced juvenile production caused by degradation of in-river habitat;
  - \* The direct and indirect stocking of trout into the river.
7. The progress of this plan will be monitored and reported annually.

## **1. Introduction**

In February 1996 the National Rivers Authority launched "A Strategy for the Management of Salmon in England and Wales" (NRA 1996).

The strategy identifies four main objectives for the management of salmon fisheries in England and Wales;-

- (i) Optimising the number of salmon returning to home water fisheries.
- (ii) Maintaining and improving the fitness and diversity of salmon stocks.
- (iii) Optimising the total economic value of surplus stocks.
- (iv) Ensuring that the necessary costs are met by beneficiaries.

These four objectives will be addressed through local **Salmon Action Plans (SAPs)** which will be produced for each of the principle salmon rivers in England and Wales by the year 2001. Each plan will review the status of the stock and the fisheries on a particular river, seek to identify the main factors limiting performance, draw up and cost a list of options to address these, and consult with local interest groups.

One concept introduced by SAPs is that of setting spawning targets to assess stock and fishery performance. This has been successfully applied on Canadian rivers for a number of years and has recently been advocated by the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organisation (NASCO) to facilitate salmon management internationally. It will provide a more objective approach to British rivers than has previously been possible.

This final SAP has resulted from extensive consultation with local fishery owners and other interested parties. It publicly defines the Agency's intentions for salmon management into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The issues raised will cascade to Regional and National Plans which will focus the Agency's business activities in the wider context. Furthermore, this SAP will feed into the River Ribble Local Environment Agency Plan (LEAP) which serves to integrate all environmental responsibilities within the Agency's remit, including management of air, land and water.

### **1.1 The Salmon Action Planning Process**

There are four key stages of the planning process:

**The Consultation Document.** The consultation document determined an egg deposition figure which would allow maximum gain from the net and rod salmon fisheries, raised a number of issues which are thought to limit existing salmon production, and identified actions which may be undertaken by the Environment Agency and other bodies to improve salmon stocks.

Supporting information on catches and economic valuation was also included to enable the document to provide long term reference which may now be read in conjunction with this plan.

**The Consultation Period.** The consultation document was widely circulated to all interested organisations and parties and comments were welcomed from any member of the public. The

consultation period extended over three months following the publication of the report and the responses provided an indication to the Agency that the major issues had been correctly identified within the catchment.

**The Action Plan.** This document re-addresses the issues raised in the consultation document giving more information on responsibilities, funding sources, priorities and timetables. No change has been made to the spawning target or the compliance assessment following the consultation, however a number of areas of improved data gathering have been identified to help in future reviews of this Plan. This Plan will then become incorporated into the River Ribble Local Environment Agency Plan (LEAP), Regional and National summary Salmon Action Plans.

**Future Review and Monitoring.** see section 4 of this document

## **2. Public Consultation**

The Regional Fisheries Advisory Committee and the Area Environment Group were consulted prior to the consultation document being released publicly. On October 13<sup>th</sup> 1999 the public launch of the consultation document took place at the Tickled Trout Hotel, Preston and marked the start of the external consultation process. Over 100 key consultees were invited to attend coinciding with press releases.

In addition, over 200 copies of the report were circulated to angling clubs and associations, local authorities, environmental organisations, as well as individuals within the catchment.

A total of 10 responses was received providing constructive comments and general support for the plan. Only one response raised an objection to the Salmon Action Plan, specifically objecting to the method of egg target calculation employed in the Plan. All comments raised were fully considered in preparation of this Action Plan and incorporated where appropriate. Some of the more frequent comments received are as follows:

**Exploitation by the rods and nets.** There was a general consensus that the current exploitation by both rods and nets was too high. A number of proposals were suggested including; the phasing out of the estuarine nets or a total quota for the net fishery; shortening the rod fishing season, banning some angling methods, operating a catch and release policy and introducing a season bag limit for anglers.

**Stocking of trout and coarse fish.** Concerns were raised over the number of catchable-sized brown trout stocked directly into the river in spring and also the number of rainbow trout that escape into the river from on-line stillwater fisheries. The reduction or better management of stocking at this sensitive time was a desirable option. The stocking of coarse fish in the mid-Ribble was also a cause of some concern, these fish being seen as significant competitors with juvenile salmonids. The issue of stocking was not originally addressed in the Ribble SAP Consultation Document, but was listed in the Local Environment Agency Plan for the Ribble. Sufficient concern has been raised to merit its inclusion in this Final Plan.

**Abstraction.** The abstraction of river water for public water supply, particularly from the River Hodder, provided another focus for concerns. The reduction and better management of abstraction was highlighted as a priority.

**Declared catches and fish counter data.** The methods used to determine escapement from the rod fishery were widely believed to be inaccurate, in particular the assessment of the relative proportions of the catch taken upstream and downstream of the counters. The declared rod catches were also believed to be significantly lower than reality. In addition, the accuracy of the fish counters (primarily Waddow) was questioned. An improved catch reporting system was highlighted as a priority, as was improving the reliability of counter data.

**Spawning Target Calculation.** There was some scepticism concerning the egg deposition targets that are central to this plan and the accuracy of the statistics used in the document, particularly with respect to historic rod catch returns.

## **2.1 Changes to the Consultation Document**

The following changes were made to the Ribble Salmon Action Plan Consultation Document in order to incorporate the results of the consultation.

1. Incorporation of stocking as a relevant and ongoing issue. This issue was raised in the Ribble LEAP (1999) and was also raised in a number of responses to the Salmon Action Plan Consultation Document (1999).
2. Deletion of the salmon flesh tainting issue that was addressed by research in 1997. The problem of flesh tainting has not been reported in recent years and no concerns were raised over this issue in responses to the SAP Consultation Document.
3. Inclusion of Bowland Initiative project in Issue 7.
4. Inclusion of LEADER II Hodder Becks project in Issue 7.
5. Inclusion of 1999 salmon egg deposition data, based on provisional declared rod catches.
6. Mortality rate of released salmon increased from 10% in Consultation Document to 20% in accordance with National guidance.





No	ISSUE	LIMITING FACTORS	OPTIONS	RESPONSIBILITY		ESTIMATED COST	DURATION OF ACTION							
				Lead	Other		'99	'00	'01	'02	'03	'04	Future	
3	In-river obstructions.	Man made obstructions prevent successful migration.	At least a dozen known weirs and intakes present in the catchment without suitable fish passes. Weirs on the River Calder prevent access to 100 hectares of habitat.	Agency RCCT	EAGGF 5b fund	From approx. £2,000 to £60,000		.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....
		In-river blockages by fallen trees.	Over eighty known blockages impede access to spawning and nursery grounds.	Agency RCCT	EAGGF 5b fund	Approx. £1,000 each	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....
4	Direct and indirect stocking of brown and rainbow trout	Spring stocking may have adverse impacts on emerging fry through predation.	Reduce direct stocking in spring in sensitive areas  Promote better stocking practice with Angling Clubs and fish farms  Reduce escapes from stillwaters where feasible  Promote catch-and-release	Agency	ACs RFA	Minimal			.....	.....	.....			
5	Low flows.	Abstraction by NWW and agriculture, particularly in River Hodder system.	Reduce any further abstractions and review existing abstractions.  Discussions with NWW concerning review of abstractions within Hodder system currently on-going.	Agency  Agency NWW		Solution dependant  Minimal	.....	.....	.....	.....				
6	Exploitation by rods and nets (note 2).	Lack of spawning fish results in failing the target egg deposition rate.	Reduce net catch by changes to gear, season, times of operation or Net Limitation Order.	Agency		) ) ) Up to £70,000	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....			
			Reduce rod catch by bag limits, catch and release or byelaws to change length of season or fishing method.	Agency	AC's	) ) )	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....			



No	ISSUE	LIMITING FACTORS	OPTIONS	RESPONSIBILITY		ESTIMATED COST	DURATION OF ACTION							
				Lead	Other		'99	'00	'01	'02	'03	'04	Future	
9	Avian predation on juveniles.	Populations impacted by increased levels of predation by goosanders and cormorants.	River Ribble is part of National research programmes. Await guidance following completion of project.	MAFF	Agency RSPB	£1 million (Nationally)		.....	.....	.....				
10	Salmon poaching.	Uncontrolled illegal fishing could seriously reduce numbers spawning.	Continue to operate effective enforcement measures including anti poaching patrols and targeting outlets buying poached fish.	Agency		Approx £30,000 pa on Ribble anti-poaching	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....
11	Spring salmon.	Unknown if stock component still present.	Collect and analyse available data from clubs.	AC's Agency		Data analysis and report	.....	.....	.....	.....				
			If present identify spawning and nursery areas for protection.	Agency AC's		Approx. £5,000				.....	.....	.....		

## Key to Action Plan Summary

AC's	Angling Clubs
Agency	Environment Agency
EP	Environmental Protection (Agency function)
FWAG	Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group
HSE	Health and Safety Executive
LU	Lancaster University
MAFF	Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food
NFU	National Farmers Union
NWW	North West Water plc
RCCT	Ribble Catchment Conservation Trust
RFA	Ribble Fisheries Association
RO	Riparian Owner
RSPB	Royal Society of the Protection of Birds
.....	Ongoing action
----	Completion of action

## Notes.

1. **Agriculture.** Agricultural activity predominates over much of the Ribble area with an emphasis on sheep farming in the upper Ribble and dairy farming in the middle and lower reaches. Pollution incidents from livestock farms can cause serious problems for the watercourse. Proactive surveys and farm visits are ongoing within the catchment to identify sources of farm pollution and pollution control staff provide advice to farmers on improvements to their waste handling and storage facilities. The use of Farm Waste Management Plans to control diffuse pollution is promoted by the Agency and agricultural consultants.
2. **Exploitation.** The graph of historic egg deposition for the Ribble (see appendix) clearly indicates that the target is not currently being met. In order to achieve this target radical changes to the existing exploitation regime may need to be enforced on the fisheries until such time as the salmon stocks improve. In order to be fair and impartial, these changes should be borne by both the rod and net fisheries.
3. **Habitat.** The degradation of in-river and bankside habitat is a major problem within the River Ribble catchment, caused mainly by intensive grazing on the river banks. This leads to bank erosion and widening of the river, causing the loss of good fish habitat features. The creation of riparian and in-river habitat should alleviate this. The Bowland Initiative, a collaborative scheme involving the Agency and FWAG (and several other organisations) encourages riparian fencing and good farm management practices. The Agency is also seeking to rectify habitat issues outwith the Bowland area in partnership with AC's, farmers and RO's by assisting in their bid for European funding under the EAGGF Objective 5b Scheme.

#### **4. Management of the Plan**

Progress at addressing the issues raised by this Salmon Action Plan will be measured through the normal reporting procedures of the River Ribble Local Environment Agency Plan (LEAP), of which this document forms a part.

The Environment Agency will be jointly responsible, with other identified organisations and individuals, for implementing this Action Plan. Progress will be monitored and reported annually by means of a review document that will be publicly available. The review document will comprise the following information:

- \* A detailed comparison of actual progress against planned progress, including updated egg deposition figures.
- \* Additional actions to maintain progress in the light of changes in the catchment.

A Regional and a National Salmon Action Plan summary report will be produced each year and will include information on the status of the salmon stocks in the rivers and progress against the plans.

Appendix

Figure 1. Historic salmon egg deposition 1988 - 1999

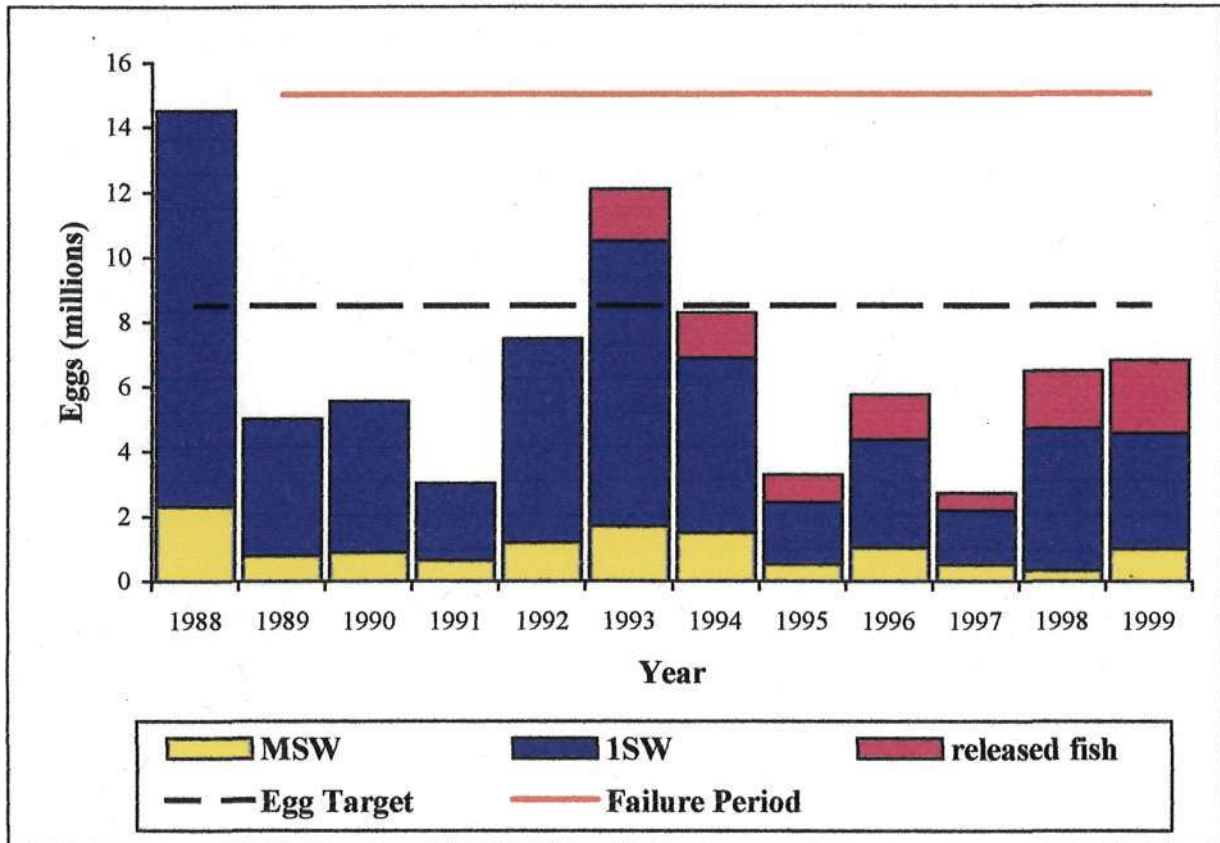


Table 1. Egg deposition

Total number of eggs 1999	Target number of eggs	Has compliance failed within last 3 years?
6.78 million	8.5 million	Yes

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Warrington WA4 1HG  
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### NORTH AREA OFFICE

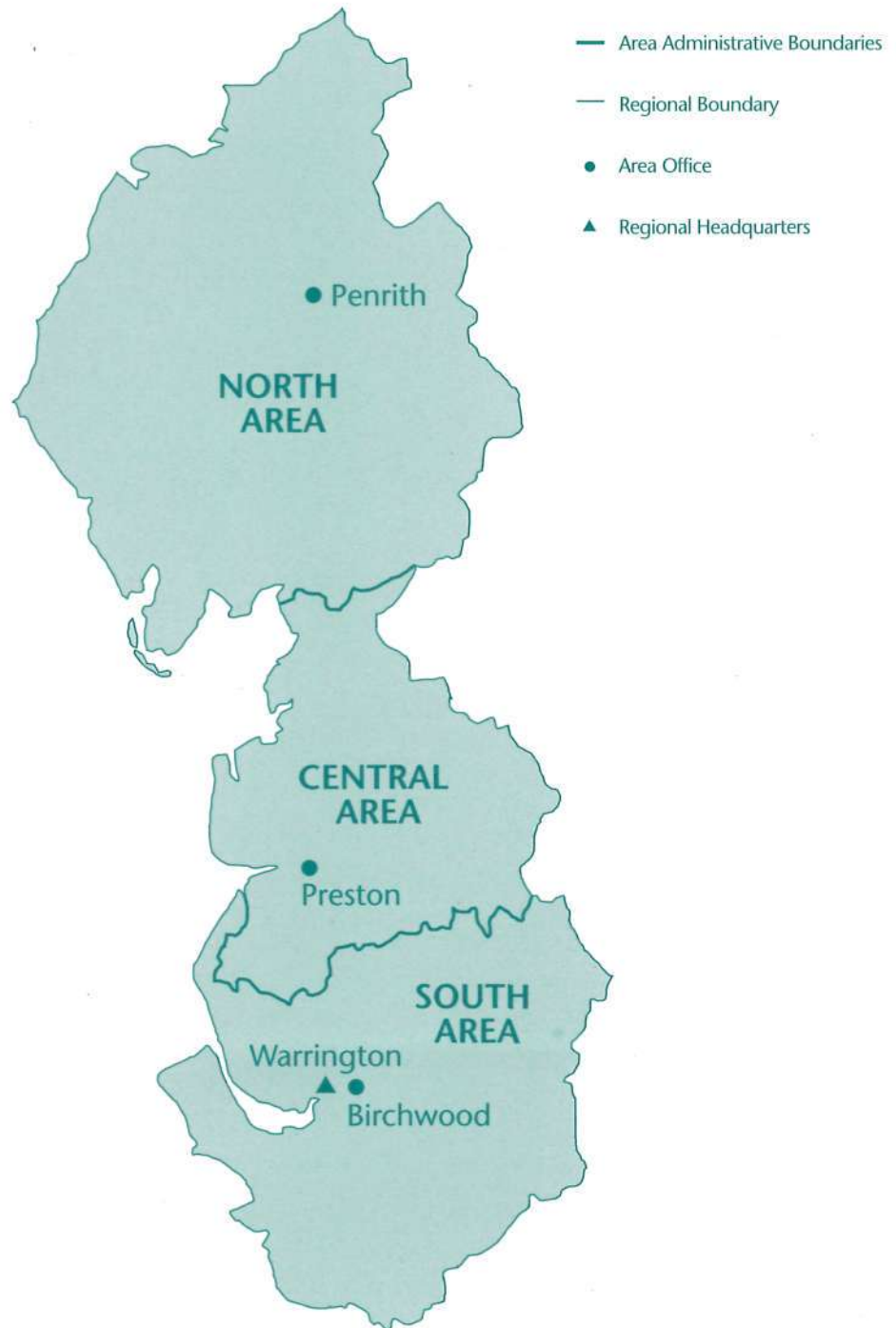
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[www.environment-agency.gov.uk](http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk)

For general enquiries please call your local Environment Agency office. If you are unsure who to contact, or which is your local office, please call our general enquiry line.

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