

River Ythan SLA Report October 2025

1. Introduction

The Don DFSB have been contracted to carry out fisheries protection, predator surveys, spawning surveys and habitat restoration activities across the river Ythan catchment throughout 2025/26 by the Ythan DSFB under a Service Level Agreement. Each activity is allocated a set number of man-days/patrols to accommodate the requirements of the annually agreed SLA. Activities are defined following consultation with the Ythan DSFB.

Any incidents relating to pollution and policing will be recorded and shared with the Clerk. Information from predator surveys will be collated and shared with the Clerk directly following the survey period. Information on spawning surveys will be collated and reported in a summary report following the end of the spawning period. Any seals reported above Logie Buchan Bridge will be reported to the Clerk as soon as possible.

All activities will be covered by the Don DSFB health and safety polices, as stated in the service level agreement.

2. Reporting

A log of all patrols and activities will be sent to the Clerk monthly.

SLA Activities/ Table 1. October, SLA Activity/Policing Patrol allocation of shifts

Date	Patrol Area	Time of Patrol	Notes/Incidents
3/10/25	Methlick to Newburgh Estuary.	1pm to 5pm 2 staff = 1 day	River level rising on the river slowly, no anglers out at time of patrol.
7/10/25	Methlick to Newburgh Estuary.	12pm to 4pm 2 staff = 1 day	Few anglers fishing the Ardlethen beat, build up of coloured salmon showing in the pools in the area.
11/10/25	Methlick to Newburgh Estuary.	6pm to 10pm 2 staff = 1 day	Report of diseased fish on the Ardlethen beat. Fishery staff walked the Ardlethen beat and found salmon and sea trout with white fungus patches on their flanks and around the head area. No dead fish identified.
30/10/25	Methlick to Newburgh Estuary	12pm to 4pm 2 staff = 1 day	A lot of anglers out on the main river, all permits checked, no dead salmon or sea trout seen, a small number of fish showing in the pools around Ardlethen area.

Saprolegnia Infection

On the 11th of November, I received reports from anglers fishing the Ardlethan beat that they were seeing adult salmon with white patches on their flanks and head. The fishery staff investigated the reports and walked the beat; they saw multiple salmon and Sea trout with patches of fungus.

The clerk of the Ythan DSF was alerted of the situation and Fishery staff will monitor the outbreak as it develops. Marine Scotland Fish Health Inspectorate along with SEPA ecology team were also notified.

A walk over survey was carried out on the 15th of November from Schivas downstream to the Meadows to establish the extent of this outbreak. 16 salmon and sea trout were found dead along with 8 sea trout showing signs of an infection.

It was later confirmed from the SEPA ecology that the infection was Saprolegnia and linked to water scarcity throughout the year and very warm river conditions.

A further survey was carried out from Fyvie downstream; there was no visual sign of infected fish found. On the 24th of the month the river finally got relief after the long dry spell, with an increase in river level.

Over the following days on the river, there was no sign of dead fish but the stronger fish that had been affected were still showing in the lower pools between Ardlethen and Schivas area, hopefully these fish will still be able to reach the spawning areas.

Fig 1, below Salmon showing sign of saprolegnia infection.



SLA Activities/ Piscivorous Bird Count/October

Table 2. Autumn Piscivorous Bird Surveys 2025.

Autumn Piscivorous Bird Surveys 2025	Number of Goosanders	Number of Cormorants	Number of Mergansers
River Ythan bird count 30 th Of October.	19	8	0

Location of Birds

From Blairfowl down to Methlick bridge 3 Goosanders were identified and 1 Cormorant, a further 4 Goosanders were seen in flight heading upstream of Methlick bridge. Just above Lovies bridge 3 Goosanders were seen. Further downstream on the Schivas water, 2 goosanders were noted. On the Ardlethen area, a flock of 5 Goosanders were identified. On the Ellon stretch only 2 Goosander was noted. On the Estuary waters 7 Cormorants were counted.

Obstructions

On the 29th of the month, 6 large trees were identified, that had blown down across the river above Methlick bridge. These trees are from Haddo estate side of the river. I have reported this to Haddo estate, who are aware of them and are in the process of dealing with these.

At this time, they are not causing any obstruction to fish passage.

Bronie Burn

On the Bronie burn, past storms have broken quite a lot of tree stakes, and the protective tubes containing the young trees are laying on the ground. I contacted Lucie from SEPA who organized the weir removal and restoration thereafter, to see if there was a policy in place for maintenance. Lucie has got back to me since and informed me that, McGowans the contractor involved with the removal of the weir, has agreed to go back to the site and re-stake the trees.

Electrofishing Results Bronie Burn

Good news, after recent electrofishing on the Bronie burn in September by Sepa’s Fish ecologist, we found salmon (and trout) fry and parr (i.e. multiple year classes from multiple spawning years) at all sites.

Here is a salmon fry and parr below in the picture, from one of the upstream sites – all good, fat fish. This is great news for the project as no salmon was found previously upstream of the old weir.



Seals

There were no reports for the month.

Coming tasks for November

Redd counts will continue.

Piscivorous Bird Count.

Over the coming months, survey to identify further habitat improvement works for 2026.

Jim kerr
Senior Fisheries officer
Acting on behalf of the Ythan DSFB