River Ythan SLA Report September 2026

1. Introduction

The Don DSFB have been contracted to carry out fisheries protection, predator surveys, spawning surveys and habitat restoration activities across the river Ythan catchment throughout 2026/27 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 upon 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. September, SLA Activity/Policing Patrol allocation of shifts

Date	Patrol Area	Time of Patrol	Notes/Incidents
10/9/26	Methlick to Newburgh Estuary.	1.30pm to 5.30pm 2 staff = 1 day	Foot patrols carried out on the lower river, all quite. 2 anglers identified at Newburgh today, quite a few Finnock showing.
30/9/26	Methlick to Newburgh Estuary.	12.30pm to 4.30pm 2 staff = 1 day	All beats checked, some anglers fishing ADAA Ardlethan water today. At Newburgh estuary, only a small number of anglers out fishing.

Angling effort for the month, has been concentrated on the tidal reaches of the river. River conditions for the month, have been on the low side, although on 3 occasions the river increased by a few inches due to prolonged rain, but descended very quickly to low flows again. While on foot patrols, we have been checking the pools for any sign of Saprolegnia infection in fish stocks. With this short increase of water levels through the month, it will help greatly in keeping the water temperature down to a safer tolerated level for Salmon and trout.

Seals

No reports of this month.

SLA Activities/ Piscivorous Bird Count/September

Table 2. Autumn Piscivorous Bird Surveys 2026.

Autumn Piscivorous Bird Surveys 2025	Number of Goosanders	Number of Cormorants	Number of Mergansers
River Ythan bird count 29th of September.	20	6	0

Location of Birds

On the 29th of the month, 20 Goosanders along with 6 Cormorants were counted during the piscivorous bird survey.

From Blairfowl down to Methlick bridge, 2 goosanders were identified. On the upper Haddo beat 3 Goosanders were disturbed. Between Tanglandford bridge and Ythanbank bridge 1 male Goosander was identified. From Ythanbank downstream to Ardlethen beat, 4 Goosanders were counted along with 2 Goosanders that were foraging in Ardlethan Pond. From Ardlethan bridge down to the railway viaduct above village of Ellon, a flock of 5 Goosanders were counted and 1 Cormorant. On the tidal reaches of the river, 3 Goosanders were accounted for and 5 Cormorants were seen at Newburgh Estuary.

Pollution

No reports for the month.

Table 3. SLA Activity/September/Gravel Washing/sections 1 and 2

Date	Time	Activity
15.09.26	9am to 5pm, 1 staff member = 1 day	Section 1 Setting silt curtain and digging over substrate to loosen
16.09.26	9am to 4.30pm, 1 staff member = 1 day	Digging over substrate to loosen.
17.09.26	12pm to 5pm, 1 staff member = 0.5 hours	Loosening very compacted gravel with garden fork.
18.09.26	9am to 5pm, 1 staff member = 1 day	By use of wind blower, loosen remainder of trapped sediment, level off gravel to finish.
21.09.26	12pm to 5pm, 1 staff member = 0.5 hours.	Section 2 Loosening compacted gravel by using garden fork.
22.09.26	9am to 1pm, 1 staff member = 0.5 hours	Loosening compacted gravel.
23.09.26	9am to 12pm, 1 staff member = 3 hours	Loosening compacted gravel, had to cancel work due to increased stream water level.
28.09.26	9am to 10.30am,1 staff member = 1½ hours	Went over to survey possibility of gravel washing, stream conditions after previous night's rain made it impossible to restart gravel washing.

29.09.26	1pm to 5.30pm, 1 staff member = 0.5 hours.	Restart gravel loosening and using leaf blower to loosen remainder of the trapped sediment.
30.09.26	9am to 5pm, 1 staff member = 1 day	Finish off gravel washing area and tidy site

Gravel Washing-Ebrie Burn

In 2021 several sections of the Ebrie burn were chosen for gravel washing, after it was found that due to compacted gravel by heavy sedimentation, salmon and trout could not break the surface layer to deposit their eggs. After gravel washing was completed on that sections, multiple salmon and sea trout utilised these sections. In 2025 while carrying out repeat Redd counts on the Ebrie burn, it was found once again that salmon and trout were just leaving scrapes where they had attempted to break through the gravel but had failed to get any depth into the gravel.

2 sites were chosen for gravel washing this year in the middle catchment of the Ebrie burn.

Section 1 is 12 meters in length and has been in the past been very productive.

Grid reference NJ 93608/40119

Section 2 is slightly smaller at 8 meters in length.

Grid reference NJ 93561/40039

Gravel washing commenced on the 15th of September and was completed by the end of September. On two occasions works could not continue due to increased water levels, making the stream very coloured and unable to see the bed of the stream to continue.

Now this task is completed, it will allow salmon and trout to successfully deposit their eggs into the gravel substrate. Gravel washing promotes higher survival rate to emerging fry stage and also gives the benefits of well oxygenated gravel, which all fish species require. Pictures below of site 1.

Fig 1, Section 1 before gravel washing

Fig 2, after gravel washing, note the gravel now shining through.

SLA Activities October/November/December.

Piscivorous bird count surveys October /November.

Annual redd counting surveys will begin on all our allocated sites chosen by the Ythan DSFB.

Checks will be made on tributaries for blockages to fish migration, will be carried out in October.

Jim Kerr
Senior Fisheries Officer
Acting on behalf of the Ythan DSFB