



“Restoration of the Lower Shannon SAC (Mulkear River) for Sea Lamprey, Atlantic Salmon and the European Otter”

## Press Release

27<sup>th</sup> March 2012

### Major Clean-up and Repair to Sea Lamprey Pass

In glorious sunshine late last week and early this week, MulkearLIFE, with the support of IFI colleagues Noel Sheehan and Flan Ryan, undertook a major repair and clean-up to the sea lamprey fish passes on Annacotty weir. These fish passes, specifically designed to improve sea lamprey passage, were installed a year ago and have been shown to be remarkably successful during the 2011 spawning season. They were shown to be extremely beneficial in assisting sea lamprey passage above the first man-made barrier on the Mulkear. The maintenance and repair work was in preparation for the 2012 season.

In an Irish context, Sea Lamprey usually spawn in May or June but this may vary according to a range of factors including water temperature. For the 2012 season MulkearLIFE aims to ensure that the project is not caught out by an early arrival of Sea Lamprey into the Mulkear system. Thus the major maintenance and repair work was undertaken a month earlier than normal. This was in large part facilitated by very low rainfall totals throughout much of the month which meant that water levels in the river have been continually falling since mid March. The very settled, dry, warm conditions may also be a trigger to an earlier than usual return of sea lamprey into the Mulkear system thus the planned work was brought forward by a month. The glorious Spring and warm temperatures have resulted in nature bursting into life. Large numbers of River Lamprey were noted on the early morning of the 26th March.

The first two pairs of sand martins to be seen by MulkearLIFE this year were also noted while the work was underway on the morning of the 26th March.

Sea lamprey are a sizeable fish in their adult phase – some are in excess of one meter in length and up to two kilogram in weight. The weir at Annacotty acts as the first major barrier to sea lamprey on the upward passage in Mulkear system. It excludes lamprey from their traditional spawning grounds in the upper reaches of the catchment. At the same time it leaves them extremely vulnerable to attack. Thus the maintenance and repair work undertaken over the past number of days involved a full clean-up of the entire face of the weir including the sea lamprey passes. More importantly, it has included the replacement of damaged or broken sheets and the entire realignment of the fish pass following the pounding it received over the winter.

To undertake this work successfully the river first had to be dammed. This was done by way of placing sandbags on the upstream sections above the sea lamprey passes. Once the vast majority of the water was displaced from the face of the weir an immense clean-up operation commenced to remove moss, dirt and grime. This in turn revealed a number of sheets on the sea lamprey passes which had been damaged or displaced. These sheets, where required, were replaced and the stainless steel substrate and sheets were once again bolted onto the face of the weir. This necessary but backbreaking work was made considerably less strenuous due to the support role of Noel Sheehan and Flan Ryan.

MulkearLIFE is confident that the design of the two sea lamprey fish passes on Annacotty weir, which have now been repaired and re-installed, will once again prove successful. This design is a first for Ireland in that it is the first ever instance where a fish pass has been specifically designed to help sea lamprey passage using the design developed by MulkearLIFE. Monitoring of passage will commence once the first sea lamprey are noted back into the system which maybe at any stage between now and late April / early May.

Further information regarding the project's work with Sea Lamprey may be viewed on this website including extensive video footage in the projects Video Gallery and on the project's new YouTube Channel.

#### Notes for Editors

1. High Resolution Digital Images are available to accompany this Press Release.
2. Interviews can be arranged with the Project Manager by using the contact details below.
3. MulkearLIFE is a new €1.75 million European Commission funded LIFE Nature project working on the restoration of the Lower Shannon Special Area of Conservation (with a focus on the Mulkear River catchment) for Atlantic Salmon, Sea Lamprey and European Otter. Further details may be viewed on the project website [www.mulkearlife.com](http://www.mulkearlife.com)
4. Inland Fisheries Ireland (Limerick) is lead partner together with the OPW and Limerick County Council. Additional funding support comes from National Parks and Wildlife Service. Other supporters include Teagasc, IFA, ICMSA, and local angling groups.
5. The project is one of the first and most important integrated catchment management projects in Ireland. It is a flagship EU LIFE Nature project –covering some 650 sq km which contain a variety of habitats and protected species. Much of the area is designated as a Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) under the EU Habitats Directive and forms part of the Natura 2000 Network.

#### **Issued by:**

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