



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

## Press Release

31<sup>st</sup> July 2013

### Major Barrier To Fish Passage Removed on the Mulkear River

July 2013 has not only been an exceptional month for MulkearLIFE and our work with Inland Fisheries Ireland and Limerick County Council but also with our other key project partner, namely the Office of Public Works. In July the OPW commenced work on the removal of a major barrier to upstream passage on the Mulkear River, namely Ballyclogh weir. This project, which has been in the planning for over a year, is the largest single instream measure that MulkearLIFE has undertaken to date. It has involved the removal of a dysfunctional fish pass and significant section of the unused weir at Ballyclogh.

The planning has included a comprehensive appropriate assessment screening report to assess any potential impact of the work. The work consists of an upgrade of the existing weir at Ballyclogh. It will include the replacement of the existing dysfunctional fish pass (on the eastern end of the weir) and the upgrading of fish passage facilities.

The removal of the main section of the weir is a recognised and approved mechanism to provide fish passage and the planned work will provide fish passage for a wide range of fish species and other aquatic species found in the Mulkear. The work was preceded by extensive sea lamprey monitoring work from mid May onwards and by observation monitoring work on site from early June. This included extensive snorkelling of the site in May and June. MulkearLIFE noted that the vast majority of sea lamprey passage had occurred by June 21<sup>st</sup> 2013, with the overwhelming majority having occurred in the first 10 days of June.

The provision of fish passage at all milldams is a requirement of the Fisheries Acts 1959 – 2010. It stipulates that there should be passage for all fish species at all times. In addition, the meets the requirements of the Habitats Directives and associated national legislation in relation to providing appropriate access to the upstream section of the Mulkear River for all species of European Union interest in particular: all 3 lamprey species, adult Atlantic salmon which give rise to juvenile salmon, all of which are designated in Annex II of the Habitats Directives. The work will also greatly assist the passage of European Eel and its prime predator the European Otter (both protected species). Improving and maintaining the diversity of fish species is considered an important component of the Water Framework Directive as fish are considered one of the main indicators of water quality.

The existing remaining portion of Ballyclogh weir (western side) will not be removed. Rather in consultation with the relevant built heritage officials, conservation work has been undertaken to underpin the structure, by remediating the effects of scour and undercutting currently taking place. This work is ongoing and to date has been achieved through the filling-in of the deep pools immediately below the weir face (western side) so as to provide a scour barrier.

This conservation work will also replace missing and loose rock and will address the ongoing problem of unauthorised fishing activity at this point. This work will not result in any material change in the character of the existing weir.

Once completed the work will provide fish passage, will address concerns regarding unauthorised illegal fishing activity and will ensure that the integrity of the built heritage of the site is retained. The work has the potential to transform the Mulkear River and open an additional 184km of habitat to Sea Lamprey and expedite the upstream migration of Atlantic Salmon.

Site works are ongoing and will continue into August 2013.

#### 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.mulkearlifeproject.com](http://www.mulkearlifeproject.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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