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Project Case Study: Collaborative Oceanography and Monitoring for Protected Areas and Species (COMPASS): Salmon Route

THEME:

Environment: Manage Marine Protected Areas & Species

FUNDING (ERDF+MATCH:

€6,289,181.25

MATCH FUNDING:

Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs Northern Ireland and The Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage

LEAD PARTNER:

The Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI)

PROJECT PARTNERS:

Marine Scotland Science, Marine Institute, Scottish Association for Marine Science, Inland Fisheries Ireland

Start Date: 01/01/2017

End Date: 30/09/2022

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Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute

The COMPASS project is delivering the first fully coherent network of monitoring buoys across the regional seas of Ireland, Northern Ireland and West Scotland.

Salmon Route

For the first time the route taken by young salmon (smolts) leaving the east coast of Ireland has been discovered.

Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) and Northern Ireland's Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) have revealed findings that prove some young salmon leaving rivers on Ireland's east coast have begun their migration to the Atlantic by travelling north to leave the Irish Sea rather than south.

130 Young Salmons were tagged and tracked with coded transmitting acoustic tags in the Castletown and Boyne rivers in County Louth last Spring. Conducted by COMPASS researchers from IFI and AFBI, the tracking allowed researchers to observe their migration periods, leading to this breakthrough discovery.

Until now, it was unknown if juvenile salmon leaving Ireland's east coast rivers headed around the North or South coasts to get to their oceanic feeding grounds. These first three tracked fish took a northward route from rivers on the east coast to exit the Irish Sea. These salmon also moved offshore quickly, behaving very differently from sea trout.

Additionally, one of the tagged smolts was discovered to have travelled up to 250km in just one month, a finding which shows, for the first time, a fast progression rate for these young salmon as they migrate to their feeding grounds in the north Atlantic.

Commenting on the findings, Dr William Roche, Senior Research Officer at IFI said:

"As salmon populations are in decline across the northern hemisphere, we urgently need to establish their migration journey and identify any issues which may be negatively impacting survival along that route. This research marks an exciting milestone and it will play a critical role in supporting marine conservation efforts."

Salmon Migration Route