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RIVER TWEED COMMISSION

History & Heritage

Established by Act of Parliament, 1807



Tagging of salmon on the River Tweed at Heughshiel by the Experimental Committee of the RTC, 1873

About the River Tweed Commission

The River Tweed Commission (RTC) is one of the oldest statutory fisheries authorities in the United Kingdom, responsible for the protection, regulation and management of Atlantic salmon, sea trout and freshwater fisheries across the River Tweed catchment since 1807. Its history is closely tied to the protection and management of the River Tweed — one of Europe's most important salmon rivers and a unique cross-border river shared between Scotland and England.

Early History

As early as the 13th century, Berwick-upon-Tweed was exporting large quantities of salted Atlantic salmon to markets across Europe. The River Tweed fisheries were economically

important for both Scotland and England, but disagreements over taxation, fishing rights, close times and access frequently led to conflict and lawlessness along the river.

Even after the union of the Scots and English parliaments in 1707, there were still no joint laws governing the Tweed fisheries, a lot of lawlessness, and little or no protection of spawning or smolt migration. Until 1771, when An Act for Regulating and Improving the Fisheries in the River Tweed received Royal Approval. This was a start – if not very successful – but men of vision (Scots, English – Borderers all, including Sir Walter Scott) kept at it.

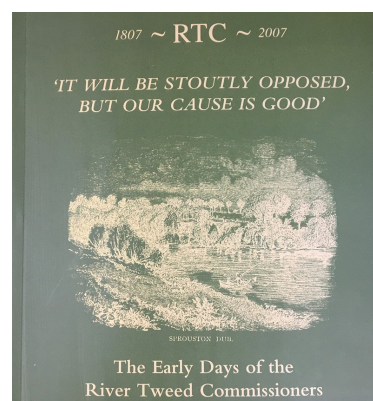
Establishment of the Commission, 1807

Until 1807, when the Act that established the River Tweed Commission (RTC) came into force. It was ground-breaking – for the first time, the commercial interests of the lower river were balanced by the importance of salmon migration to the upper river. From this time on, the river moved slowly from a primarily commercial netting operation to the world-class rod fishery it is today.

This was a landmark development in salmon conservation and river management, recognising the need to balance commercial fishing interests in the lower river with the protection of salmon migration and spawning habitat throughout the wider catchment.



Colourised 1873 tagging engraving



Bicentenary Book cover, 2007

Evolution Through the 19th and 20th Centuries

Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, the Commission's role evolved alongside advances in fisheries science, river conservation and environmental management. Over time, the River Tweed transitioned from a predominantly commercial netting river into one of the world's most recognised salmon angling destinations, supporting rural communities, tourism and the wider economy of the Scottish Borders and northern England.

Further legislation followed, including the Tweed Fisheries Act 1969, which modernised governance arrangements and expanded representation within the Commission to include local authorities and angling clubs alongside salmon fishery proprietors.

Devolution and Modern Legislation

Following Scottish devolution in 1998, earlier fisheries legislation was consolidated within the Scotland Act 1998 (River Tweed) Order 2006. This legislation remains the principal legal

framework governing fisheries management on the River Tweed today, defining the Commission's statutory powers, duties and governance arrangements across both Scotland and England.

Under the 2006 Order, the RTC is charged with the general preservation and increase of salmon, sea trout and other freshwater fish in the River Tweed and its tributaries – in particular the regulation of fisheries, the removal of nuisances and obstructions, and the prevention of illegal fishing. The area of jurisdiction extends 8 km out to sea, covering the coastline between Cockburnspath and Holy Island.

Governing Body Composition	
Local authority appointed members / angling clubs / other interests	43
River proprietor elected members	38

The Bicentenary Book (2007)

In 2007, to celebrate 200 years of fisheries management on Tweed and raise funds for the Tweed Foundation, the RTC published a book on its foundation and early years, written by Caroline Balfour. 'It Will Be Stoutly Opposed, But Our Cause Is Good' is a fascinating – sometimes humorous – account of the lawlessness which was rife on the river up to the 1700s, and how a few dedicated men sought to regulate and nurture its prime asset: the salmon.

"This should interest anyone who fishes Tweed and wishes to understand the early days of its transformation from one of Britain's most lucrative commercial fisheries into a truly great rod fishery... What developed from the struggles between the various Tweed factions in the early 1800s served as a blueprint for the system of management of Scotland's salmon... This is an important volume, drawn from extensive, meticulous and original research."

– Andrew Graham-Stewart, Trout & Salmon Magazine, December 2007

Copies are available (£10 plus postage) from the River Tweed Commission offices. All proceeds go to the Tweed Foundation.

The Commission Today

Today, the River Tweed Commission continues to regulate and protect salmon, sea trout and other freshwater fish throughout the Tweed district. Its work includes fisheries enforcement, conservation, biosecurity, habitat protection and supporting the long-term sustainability of migratory fish populations and freshwater biodiversity across the River Tweed catchment.

Modern fisheries management now benefits from advanced scientific research, ecological monitoring, genetics, fish passage improvement, habitat restoration and a greater understanding of biodiversity and environmental pressures. However, the central purpose of the River Tweed Commission remains fundamentally unchanged from that established more than 200 years ago: the protection and responsible management of the River Tweed and its Atlantic salmon for future generations.