

Inland Fisheries

Annual Report 2025



Department of
**Agriculture, Environment
and Rural Affairs**

An Roinn

**Talmhaíochta, Comhshaoil
agus Gnóthaí Tuaithe**

Depairtment o'

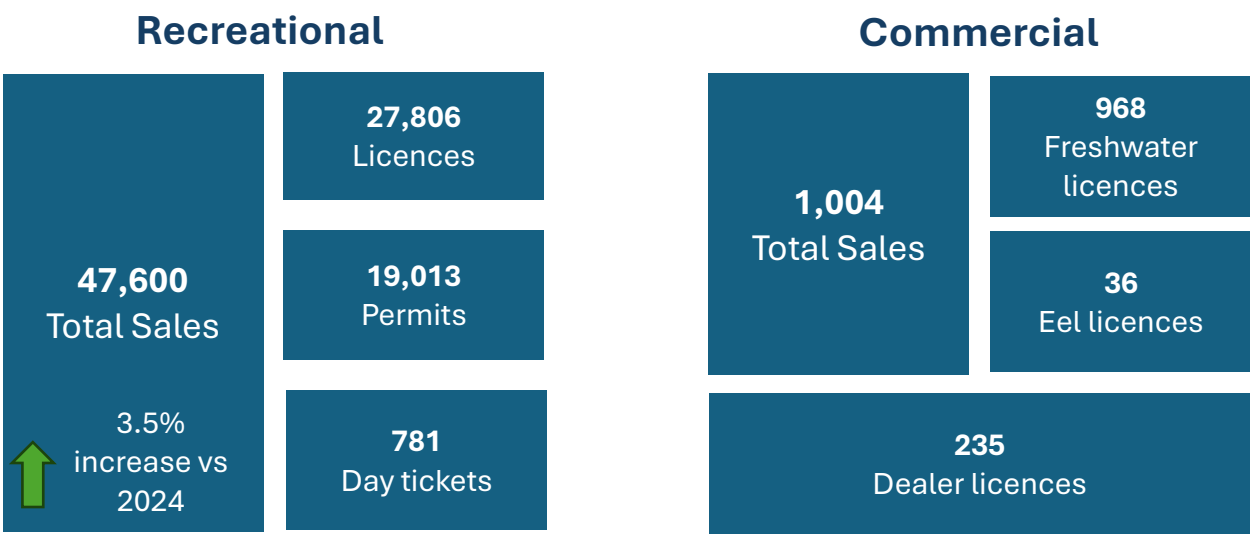
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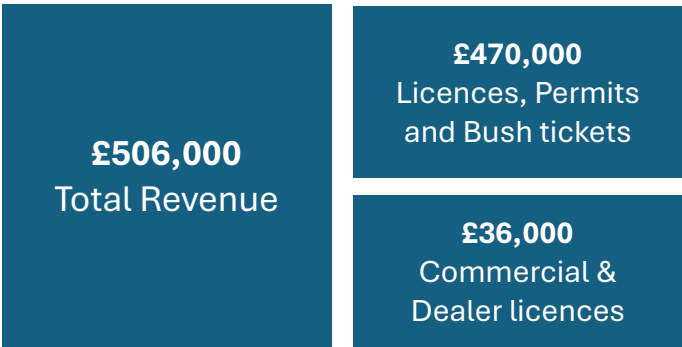
Key Statistics

1st January – 31st December 2025

Angling Activity



Income Generated



Enforcement Activity



Inspections

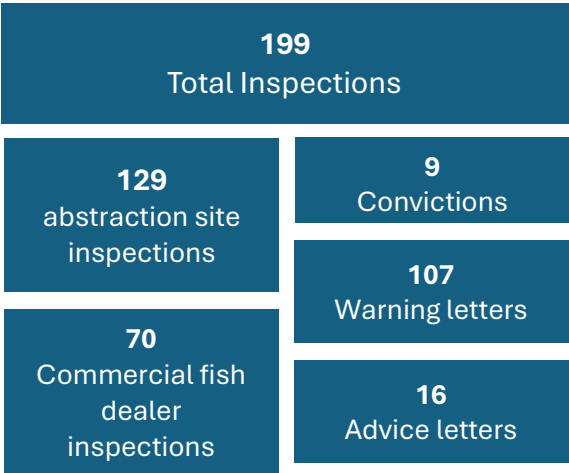


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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Inland Fisheries Responsibilities

Under the Fisheries Act (Northern Ireland) 1966, Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) is responsible for the salmon and inland fisheries of Northern Ireland. The Act provides DAERA with powers to supervise and protect fisheries and to foster their establishment and development.

DAERA provides advice and guidance on the conservation, protection, development and promotion of salmon and inland fisheries to angling clubs, fishery owners and other water users, excluding the Foyle and Carlingford areas, which are the responsibility of the Loughs Agency.

The Inland Fisheries Branch is part of DAERA's Marine and Fisheries Division within the Environment, Marine and Fisheries Group (EMFG). The Division is responsible for the sustainable management of fish stocks, both inland and marine, including aquaculture and fish health.

This work contributes to the Department's purpose of delivering a net-zero, nature-positive future that supports sustainable agriculture and thriving rural communities.

The eight priorities that shape DAERA's work are provided here:

- Tackling and responding to Climate Change together in a fair and just way.
- Protecting and restoring our terrestrial and marine environment.
- Strengthening environmental governance.
- Supporting sustainable, resilient and productive agri-food and fishing sectors.
- Safeguarding animal health and welfare plus plant health.
- Building strong, sustainable and diverse rural communities.
- Investing in our science and research and development capacity.
- Implementing the Windsor Framework.

1.2 Public Angling Estate

Under the Fisheries Act (Northern Ireland) 1966, the DAERA has powers to acquire, manage and improve angling facilities.

The Inland Fisheries Branch is responsible for the management and development of Northern Ireland's Public Angling Estate (PAE), which comprises lakes and rivers providing game and coarse angling, and for which DAERA owns or leases the fishing rights.

An annual programme of work is implemented to maintain and improve angling facilities across the estate. For certain waters, DAERA has management agreements in place with angling clubs or community groups, which manage fisheries on DAERA's behalf.

DAERA recognises the contribution of angling to cultural, educational, economic, health and social outcomes. In conjunction with angling stakeholders, DAERA has developed a strategic plan for the PAE. The plan sets out a framework for the protection of the natural environment and the enhancement of the angling experience. DAERA is working with stakeholders to deliver the ten objectives contained within the Public Angling Estate Strategic Plan 2026–2031, available at:

<https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/daera-public-angling-estate-pae-strategic-plan-2026-2031>

2. LEGISLATION

Under the Fisheries Act (Northern Ireland) 1966, the DAERA is responsible for the establishment, development, supervision and protection of fisheries within its jurisdiction. Responsibility for the Foyle and Carlingford catchments rests with the Loughs Agency. Within DAERA, the Inland Fisheries Branch discharges the Department's functions in relation to inland fisheries. These activities are supported by a range of subordinate legislation regulating fisheries operations.

The principal legislative instruments include the Fisheries Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014, which regulate angling and commercial fishing activity, and the Eel Fishing Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010, which set out requirements for commercial eel fishing, currently restricted to Lough Neagh. DAERA also manages, directly or indirectly, 89 publicly accessible fisheries through the PAE, which is governed by the Public Angling Estate Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005.

The Eel Fishing (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2025 came into operation on 1 January 2026. These Regulations amend permitted fishing seasons and introduce additional controls to support the management of the Lough Neagh eel fishery. The introduction of Fishery Management Plans for Lough Erne and Lough Neagh also requires amending and implementing a number of related technical and procedural Regulations, which are currently progressing.

The Fisheries, Aquaculture and Water Environment Bill was introduced and passed Second Stage during June 2026. The Bill will modernise fisheries legislation and give effect to fisheries policies that are consistent with the UK Fisheries Framework, which sets out how the UK and devolved administrations work together on fisheries management. The Joint Fisheries Statement (JFS) provides the strategic direction for achieving the eight fisheries objectives set out in the Fisheries Act 2020. While the JFS focuses primarily on sea fisheries, it also sets expectations for inland fisheries management, which will inform future policy development.

3. LICENCE & PERMITS

To fish legally in Northern Ireland's PAE, an angler needs (i) a rod licence and (ii) a permit or day ticket. The rod licence is necessary for the fishing rod and the specific game or coarse fish they are allowed to catch. A permit or day ticket grants the right to fish in a particular fishery.

Table 1: Total number of DAERA angling licences and permits sold, 2022 – 2025.

	2022	2023	2024	2025
Licences	26,298	26,871	26,381	27,806
Permits	19,751	19,757	18,574	19,013
Bush Tickets	899	1,102	997	781
Total	46,948	47,730	45,952	47,600

In 2025, DAERA sold a total of 47,600 angling licenses, permits, and day tickets, totalling 27,806 - an increase of 5.4% from 2024. Permit sales rose by 2.3% from 18,574 in 2024 to 19,013 in 2025. Overall, total sales increased by 3.5% compared to the previous year (Table 1).

Table 2: Game angling licences and permits sold by licence type and purchase method (Online or Distributor) in 2025.

Category	Licence Sales			Permit Sales			Licence + Permit Total
	Online Portal	Distributor sales	Licence Total	Online Portal	Distributor sales	Permit Total	
Game 3 Day	3,521	321	3,842	3,599	435	4,034	7,876
Game 14 Day	379	118	497	339	116	455	952
Season Under 12 Licence	313	20	333	–	–	–	333
Season Juvenile	2,165	411	2,576	1,628	331	1,959	4,535
Game Season	3,339	807	4,146	760	115	875	5,021
Concessionary Disabled	1,567	465	2,032	1,225	360	1,585	3,617
Concessionary Senior Citizen	3,410	2,734	6,144	2,099	1,502	3,601	9,745
Total	14,694	4,876	19,570	9,650	2,859	12,509	32,079

A total of 32,079 licences and permits were issued, with 19,570 licences and 12,509 permits. The largest category was Concessionary Senior Citizen, accounting for 9,745 transactions, followed by Game 3 Day (7,876) and Game Season (5,021). Most sales were made via the DAERA portal (Table 2).

Table 3: Coarse angling licences and permits sold by licence type and purchase method (Online or Distributor) in 2025.

Category	Licence via DAERA	Licence via Distributor	Licence Total	Permit via DAERA	Permit via Distributor	Permit Total	Grand Total
Coarse 3 Day	2,336	286	2,622	2,271	271	2,542	5,164
Coarse 14 Day	840	351	1,191	828	348	1,176	2,367
Coarse Season	2,930	564	3,494	2,022	403	2,425	5,919
Total:	6,106	1,201	7,307	5,121	1,022	6,143	13,450

The sales of coarse angling licenses and permits in 2025, totalling 13,450, with 7,307 licenses and 6,143 permits sold, is shown in Table 3. Most purchases were made directly through the DAERA. Coarse Season licenses had the highest sales at 5,919, followed by Coarse 3-Day licenses at 5,164 and Coarse 14-Day licenses at 2,367. The data show a strong preference for online purchases and greater demand for season-long and short-term licenses than for mid-duration options (Table 3).

Table 4: Other sales (Bush tickets, Endorsements and Local Area Permits) in 2025

Category	Licence Total	Permit Total	Day Ticket	Total
Bush Tickets	–	–	781	781
Endorsements	929	–	–	929
Local Area Permit	–	361	–	361
Total				2,071

A total of 2,071 sales were made across these products, with Bush Tickets accounting for 781 day ticket purchases. Endorsements represented the largest single category overall, with 929 licences issued, while Local Area Permits accounted for 361 permit sales (Table 4).

Table 5: Overall Sales Totals for 2025

Type	Total
Licence Sales	27,806
Permit Sales	19,013
Bush Tickets	781
Grand Total	47,600

Licence sales account for the largest share at 27,806, followed by 19,013 permit sales, while Bush tickets contribute a smaller figure of 781. Together, these categories produce a combined total of 47,600 transactions (Table 5).

Table 6: DAERA licence, permit, commercial and dealer sales revenue generated 2022 to 2025

Year	2022	2023	2024	2025
Angling licence sales	£219,298.50	£224,471.00	£214,716.00	£215,323.00
Angling permit sales*	£339,004.50	£354,125.00	£303,408.00	£312,814.00
Bush ticket sales*	£15,154.00	£21,160.00	£16,703.00	£14,280.00
Angling Sales Total	£573,457.00	£599,756.00	£534,827.00	£542,417.00
Minus 20% VAT on permits and Bush tickets*	-£70,831.70	-£75,057.00	-£64,022.20	-£65,418.80
Commission earned by distributors from the sale of DAERA licenses and permits.	-£10,341.33	-£13,058.03	-£9,919.49	-£7,024.80
Angling Revenue Total	£492,283.97	£511,640.97	£460,885.31	£469,973.40
Commercial fishing licence revenue	£39,231.00	£35,638.00	£27,625.00	£24,108.00
Dealers licence revenue	£9,443.50	£10,058.50	£10,706.00	£11,867.50
Commercial Total	£48,674.50	£45,696.50	£38,331.00	£35,975.50
Grand Total	£540,958.47	£557,337.47	£499,216.31	£505,948.90

**VAT is payable on Permits (including Bush tickets)*

Total revenue rose from £540,958 in 2022 to £557,337 in 2023, then stabilised just above £500,000 in 2025. Angling income dominates, supported by stable licence sales and higher-value permits. Commercial fishing licence revenue shows a gradual decline, while dealer licence income steadily grows. Overall, angling remains vital to total revenue, with commercial and dealer licences contributing more modestly (Table 6).

Commercial fishing and dealer licences

DAERA issues commercial fishing licences for eel, salmon and other freshwater species fishing. To assist conservation efforts, legislation was introduced in 2014 that prohibits commercial netting of salmon. Dealer licences, needed to sell freshwater fish and wild salmon to the public, are issued by DAERA in the DAERA jurisdiction. A dealer licence covers all vendors from fish vans to large supermarkets.

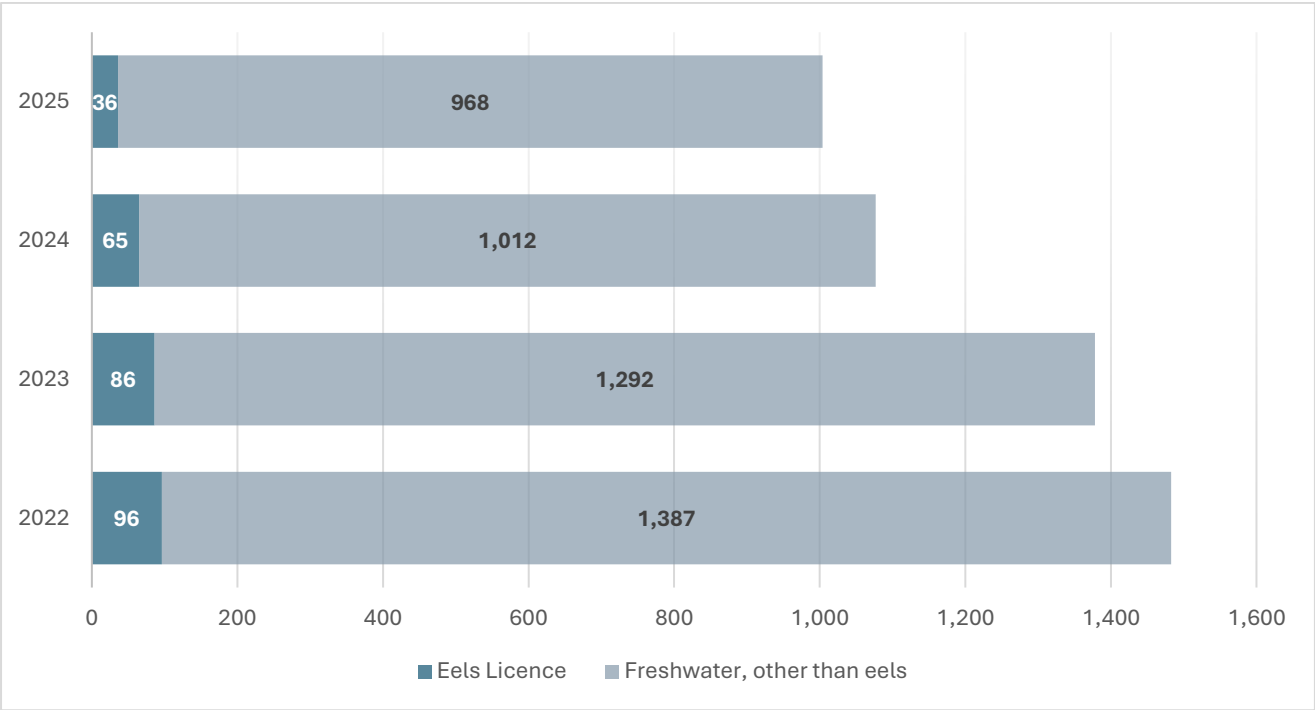


Figure 1: Number of DAERA commercial eel and freshwater licences sold 2022-2025

Over this period, licence numbers vary year to year, indicating changes in participation in the commercial eel and freshwater fishing sector. Thirty-six eel licences, and 968 freshwater commercial licences were issued in 2025 (Figure 1).

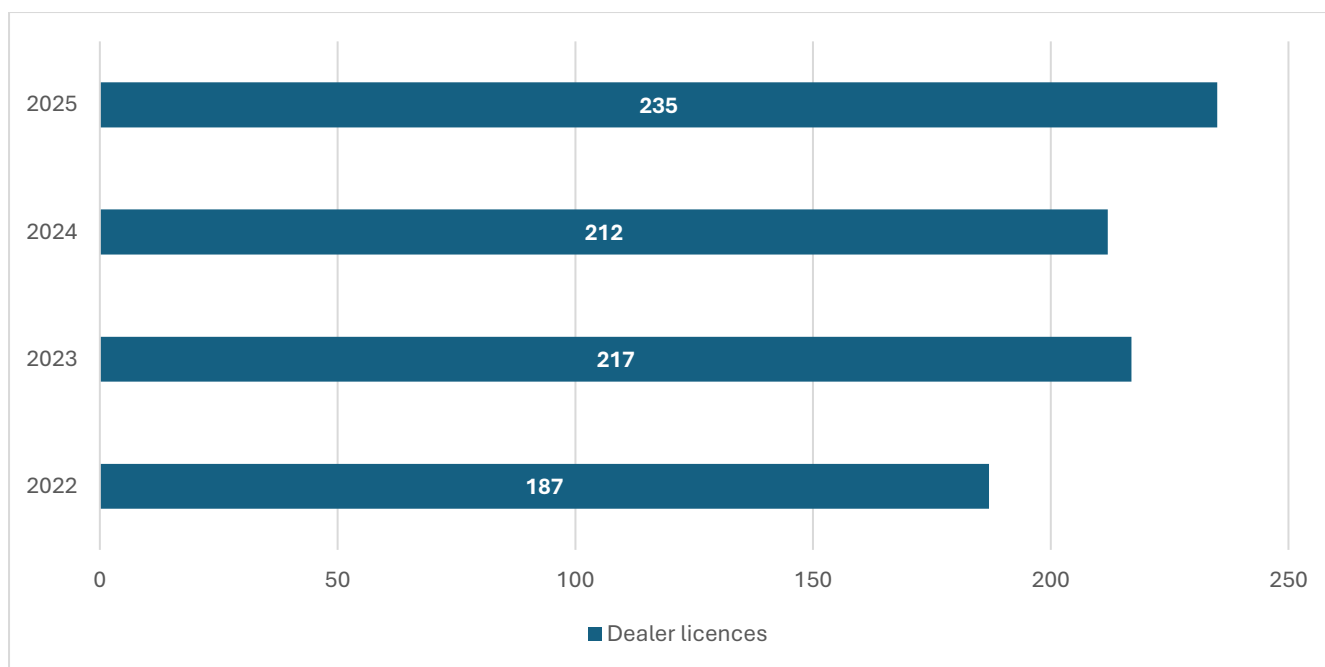


Figure 2: Number of DAERA Dealer licences sold 2022-2025

While licence numbers fluctuate across the period, the overall trend indicates a broadly stable level of licensed fish dealers operating in Northern Ireland. This consistency suggests sustained compliance with the licensing requirements set out under the Fisheries Act (Northern Ireland) 1966.

In 2025, 235 dealer licences were issued (Figure 2).

The requirement for dealers to obtain a licence and maintain accurate records of all fish bought or sold-including species subject to tighter controls such as salmon, trout, eels, pike, and pollan-continues to underpin participation in the regulated fish trade. The fluctuations observed reflects the ongoing role of DAERA’s licensing framework in maintaining oversight of fish sales conducted from approved premises or registered vehicles (Figure 2).

4. PROTECTION & ENFORCEMENT

Table 7: Enforcement activity on DAERA and private waters, 2022 to 2025

	2022	2023	2024	2025
DAERA PAE waters				
Rod Licences checked	2,297	2,116	747	1,261
DAERA permits checked	2,291	2,097	726	1,266
Detections of illegal activity	118	77	114	95
Private waters				
Rod licences checked	1,285	999	551	984
Detections of illegal activity	46	25	33	61
All waters				
Boat patrols	228	125	159	185
Coastal shore patrols	80	50	52	38
Illegal fishing nets seized	2	1	10	7

Enforcement activity is both proactive and reactive; regular patrols are conducted to monitor commercial fishermen and anglers to ensure compliance with the 1966 Fisheries Act and Fisheries Regulations. DAERA enforcement officers work on both DAERA PAE waters and private waters in the DAERA jurisdiction.

In 2025, there were 1,261 rod licences checked in DAERA PAE waters, and 984 licences checked on private waters (Table 7). Also in 2025, there were 512 barrier assessments conducted as per the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organization's (NASCO) objectives.

Table 8: Number of inspections 2022 to 2025

	2022	2023	2024	2025
Number of inspections				
Commercial fish dealers' inspections	38	24	24	70
Water abstraction site inspections	89	91	94	129
Total	127	115	118	199

Regular inspections are carried out at commercial dealers to ensure that all freshwater fish being sold have been caught legally.

Table 9: Prosecutions and enforcement action 2022 to 2025

	2022	2023	2024	2025
Convictions	17	3	4	9
Warning letters issued	39	17	85	107
Advice letter given	163	48	32	16

Where appropriate, DAERA prepares cases for prosecution for consideration by the Public Prosecution Service NI. DAERA may deal with less serious breaches of legislation by means of (i) advisement and (ii) warning letters.

5. DAERA FISH FARMS

Zebra mussels were found at Movanager Fish Farm in June 2023. As a precaution, the Department suspended the movement of live fish from the farm for the remainder of 2023, and no fish of takeable size were stocked in 2024, in compliance with the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985. It is important to note that purchasing a permit allows anglers to fish in those waters but does not guarantee any fish stocking within the PAE.

Table 10 - Number of takeable-sized trout stocked from Movanager Fish Farm 2022 – 2025

Takeable-sized Trout	2022	2023	2024	2025
Brown Trout	71,500	56,500	0	29,500
Rainbow Trout	50,600	23,700	0	16,000
Total (PAE Waters)	122,100	80,200	0	45,500

In 2025, DAERA resumed stocking the PAE from Movanager Fish Farm, the first time since June 2023. Stocking figures are listed below for Brown and Rainbow Trout.

Table 11 – March 2025 PAE stocking of Brown trout (3+ years of age)

Area	Amount of Brown Trout
Altnahinch	4,000
Ballykeel	1,000
Bellanalect (Mill Lough)	2,500
Bantry	1,000
Castlewellan	1,500
Corry	1,000
Cowey	1,000
Keenaghan	500
Killylane	4,000
Lough Bradan	2,000
Loughbrickland	1,000
Marshallstown	3,000
Middle South Woodburn	2,000
Moor Lough	1,500
Navar Lakes Achork	500
Navar Lakes Glencrewan	1,000
Navar Lakes Meenameen	1,000
Stoneyford	1,000
Total	29,500

Table 12 – December 2025 PAE stocking of Rainbow trout

Fishery	Amount of Rainbow Trout
Binevenagh	1,500
Corrany	1,500
Craigavon	1,500
Hillsborough	3,000
Lough Money	3,000
North Woodburn	4,000
White Lough	1,500
Total	16,000

Bushmills Salmon Station

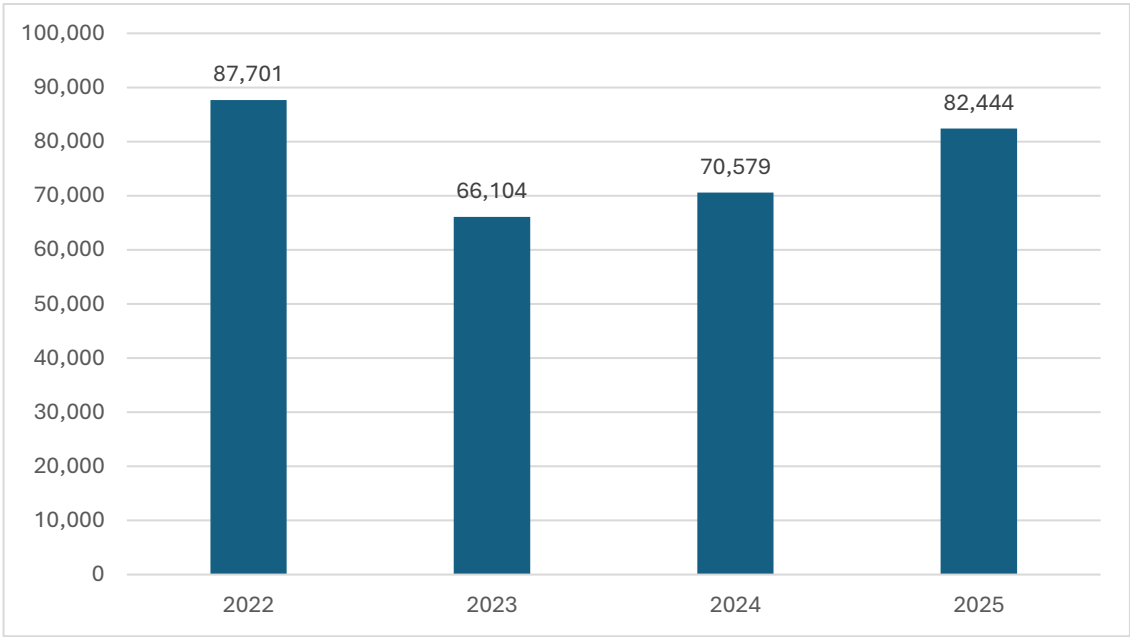


Figure 3: Number of salmon smolts released from Bushmills Hatchery 2022 to 2025

The number of salmon smolts released in the River Bush in 2025 was 82,444. This was a increase of 16.8% from 2024 (Figure 3).

6. CONCLUSION

In 2025, DAERA continued to fulfil its statutory responsibilities for the protection, development, and sustainable management of DAERA's inland fisheries. Throughout the PAE and the wider fisheries network, the Department made measurable progress despite facing operational challenges, including the constraints to stocking from Movanager Fish Farm

The year showed a steady recovery and strong participation across the angling sector. License and permit sales remained steady, with total sales up from the previous year. Enhanced monitoring and compliance operations-covering PAE waters, private waters, and commercial fisheries-helped to protect fish stocks and ensure adherence to statutory requirements.

Stocking activities resumed in 2025 in compliance with the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985, resulting in the successful release of both rainbow and brown trout to enhance angling opportunities and maintain healthy fish populations in the PAE. Additionally, the continued release of salmon smolts from Bushmills Hatchery contributed to long-term monitoring and conservation objectives for wild Atlantic salmon within the River Bush system and as an index salmon river for Northern Ireland.

Legislative work progressed during 2025, including amendments to eel fishing regulations and the introduction of the Fisheries, Aquaculture and Water Environment Bill. These updates will help ensure that DAERA's fisheries management remains aligned with the UK Fisheries Framework and responsive to evolving environmental challenges.

The Department will continue to work collaboratively with stakeholders, angling groups, and partner organisations to deliver sustainable, well-managed fisheries that provide environmental, economic, and social benefits for both current and future generations.