

# Stopping the slaughter

HARALD OYEN reports on Norway's new netting and angling laws and how they will affect the 2008 season

**A**S REPORTED IN brief last month, Norwegian fishery authorities are to introduce new salmon-fishing (netting and angling) regulations for the period 2008-2012. Bag-net fishing of mixed stocks along the Norwegian coast is to be phased out, allowing 10,000-15,000 more salmon to reach their spawning rivers. Far more salmon, 75,000-85,000, will benefit when bag-netting in fjord areas is delayed until July 1 or July 10, providing four to five extra weeks of unhindered running for big and medium-size salmon. These measures will have a major impact on salmon numbers and future angling opportunities.

Bag-net fishing is widely regarded as the main obstacle to the improvement of salmon numbers in Norwegian rivers and normally far exceeds river catches: over the past seven years 200,000-250,000 salmon have been caught annually by bag-net methods (including the estimate of undeclared catches) at an average weight of around 10 lb, compared to 120,000-150,000 salmon killed every year by anglers (including the estimate of undeclared catches).

A backdrop to Norway's new regulations are the

recommendations of the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organisation (NASCO) and the International Council for the Exploitation of the Sea, which state that international best practice for the management of North Atlantic salmon requires the adoption of the precautionary approach and the cessation of indiscriminate mixed-stock fisheries. NASCO predicts that in future the harvest of salmon, by any means, will be restricted to stocks of rivers that are meeting their conservation limits. This means there will be no indiscriminate capture of fish.

However, bag-net fishing is an old tradition in Norway and this makes it particularly difficult to change, despite the clear understanding that indiscriminate bag-net-fishing has a dire effect on salmon stocks. Accordingly, Norway's Directorate of Nature Management (DN) has not suggested a total cessation of coastal bag-netting, opposing the recommendation from NASCO. In addition to salmon heading for Norwegian rivers, this will adversely affect salmon migrating to Russia (Kola) and the west coast of Sweden.

The major changes proposed by the DN are:

● No bag-net fishing in a number of fjords –*ie* Hardangerfjord,

Sognefjord, Romsdalsfjord, Førdefjord – affecting, among others, the rivers Vosso, Etnø, Lærdal, Nausta, Nærøy, Årøy, Flåm and Rauma.

● No bag-net-fishing in the inner part of Trondheim fjord – affecting the rivers Verdal and Stjørdal.

● A 30-40 day delay to the start of bag-net-fishing in coastal and fjord areas in most of Norway – with a particularly positive effect on rivers in the Arctic and Central Norway regions, including the rivers Lakselv, Alta, Tana, Målselv, Beiar, Namsen, Verdal, Stjørdal, Gaula, Orkla and Surna.

● A reduction in the number of bag-net fishing days each week in other parts of Norway – affecting rivers in the Eastern Norway and Arctic regions.

Strict angling regulations are also to be introduced, with bag limits and seasonal quotas on most rivers, which will markedly reduce the number of fish killed.

Until now, Norway has allowed unrestricted fishing on most rivers, (*ie* any angler can kill as many salmon as he wants) with only a few recent exceptions. As more salmon are expected to avoid the nets and run freely through fjords in June, river regulations need to ensure sufficient salmon are released for conservation purposes and as such quotas and catch-and-release

regulations are to be introduced.

Most rivers will allow anglers one salmon per day, two or three per week and up to ten per season (*eg* Gaula, Orkla, Namsen). Others will allow anglers one salmon per day, two per week and between three and five per season. To allow anglers a full fishing day, the first salmon can be released, and, if you wish, the second, and third *etc*. But as soon as you kill a fish, your fishing must stop for the day. Anglers can bring a fish or two back from Norway, therefore, if they have first released fish, based on that river's quota system.

The new angling regulations will be confirmed by February 15 and those regarding bag-netting by March 1. This is in time for the start of the angling season on June 1, ending August 31. It is to be hoped the new regulations will have an immediate effect on prospects. Traditionally, peak fishing weeks are from June 20 to July 20, but some rivers in the Arctic are some weeks later and the Suldal River in the South-west of Norway normally starts properly in mid-August. All the major rivers in the Central Norway region (Namsen, Verdal, Stjørdal, Gaula, Orkla, Surna) expect big salmon from the beginning of June with grilse from the start of July.