

Most migratory fish and salmonids remain threatened – a glimmer of light in sight

According to the latest estimate, 12 (16%) of the 75 fish species or ecotypes assessed are threatened. The most threatened fish species still include the arctic char and the landlocked salmon as well as marine populations of grayling and the European eel. The status of the sea trout has improved slightly, but all in all the situation of salmonids is still poor. Furthermore, the status of the burbot and the European flounder has weakened.

The situation of the European eel has clearly worsened in both Finland and the rest of Europe, which is why the species was reclassified from endangered to **critically endangered**. This highest conservation category also still includes the arctic char, the landlocked salmon and marine populations of grayling, the natural populations of which are very low in number, with low reproduction rates in the wild. These fish stocks are strongly supported with the help of fish farming and fish stocking. The fact that the number of spawners in populations of arctic char and landlocked salmon has increased in recent years gives some hope for the future, particularly as more attention has been paid to unwanted fishing and spawning capability.



A 7-kg male landlocked salmon caught in Kuurna, Pielisjoki, being held up by Marko Svärd from Luke. Photo by Jorma Piironen, Luke.

The species with the second highest conservation status, i.e. **endangered**, continue to include marine populations of anadromous whitefish (*Coregonus lavaretus maraena*), southern trout populations and the sea trout. The actions taken to improve the reproduction of sea trout in the wild, such as removing obstructions to fish passage, building fishways, renovating fish spawning grounds and placing restrictions on fishing, have helped increase the number of juvenile trout. This is why the conservation status of the sea trout could be lowered from critically endangered to endangered, even though most sea trout that are caught originate from fish stocking, and more conservation measures are needed.

The remaining southern grayling populations were reclassified from near threatened to **vulnerable** due to their weakened status. Other species that remain vulnerable include populations of *Coregonus lavaretus pallasi*, marine populations of *Coregonus lavaretus widegreni* as well as salmon populations in

the Arctic Ocean and the Baltic Sea. The situation of the salmon has partly improved, but not enough to remove its threatened status.

Based on increased information, the spined loach, which was previously classified as threatened, was reclassified as **near threatened**. New species added to the near threatened category also include the European flounder and the burbot, the catches of which have decreased significantly in marine waters. The black goby, the two-spotted goby and the sea stickleback were also added to this category.

The threat to species can be reduced by removing obstacles to fish passage and improving water quality

The most significant cause of migratory fish becoming threatened is obstacles that prevent spawners from accessing their spawning grounds and their offspring from exiting these areas. The more we build fishways in rivers to help migratory fish pass by dams and the more we remove obstacles to fish passage, the better threatened fish populations are increased by natural reproduction.

The wastewater generated by mines, industry, densely populated areas, agriculture and forestry hinder the reproduction of fish populations. The reproduction of several fish species and the recovery of fish populations could be boosted by improving water quality and the oxygen levels in water. This would require the acidity, contaminants and nutrients in water to be reduced.

It is important that we comply with the new, stricter fishing regulations on the minimum size of fish caught and fishing seasons. Every undersized trout, salmon, grayling or arctic char that is spared by fishermen helps increase the offspring produced by the species and thereby leads to larger catches and catching of larger fish.

Conservation status of fish species in Finland and the 2019 Red List of Finnish Species

	Regionally extinct (RE)	Acipenser oxyrinchus, wels catfish	2
TH	Critically endangered (CR)	landlocked salmon, arctic char, marine populations of grayling, European eel	4
TH	Endangered (EN)	sea trout, whitefish (<i>Coregonus lavaretus maraena</i>), Southern Finland lake trout	3
TH	Vulnerable (VU)	Baltic Sea salmon, Arctic Ocean salmon, whitefish (<i>Coregonus lavaretus pallasii</i> and <i>Coregonus lavaretus widegreni</i>), Southern Finland grayling	5
	Near threatened (NT)	burbot, black goby, European flounder, asp, whitefish (<i>Coregonus lavaretus nilssonii</i>), sea stickleback, two-spotted goby, European river lamprey, northern lake trout, spined loach	10
	Data deficient (DD)	snake blenny, rock gunnel, shorthorn sculpin, longspined bullhead, common seasnail, whitefish in inland waters (<i>Coregonus lavaretus widegreni</i> and <i>Coregonus lavaretus maraena</i>)	7

TH = threatened

The assessment of threatened fish species was carried out by a group of experts from Natural Resources Institute Finland (Luke) under the guidance of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry.

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Links

- [The 2019 Red List of Finnish Species](#)
- [Web service of the Finnish Red List](#)