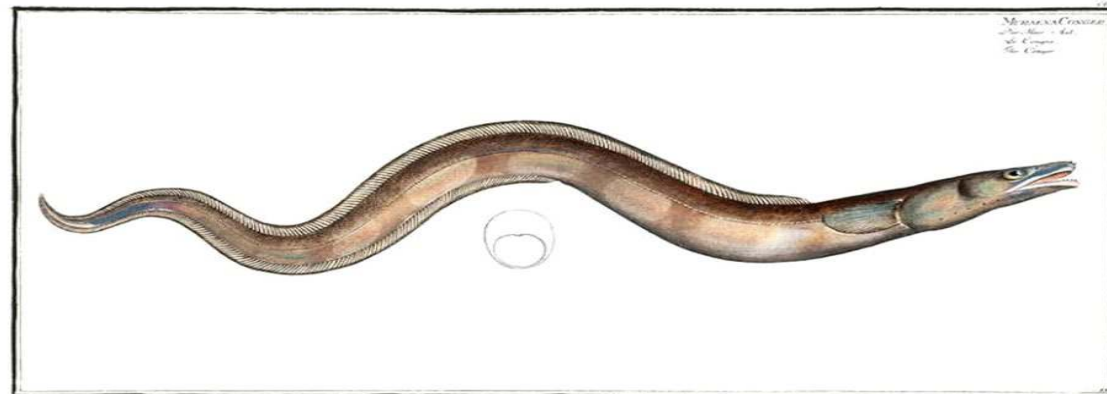




Eels, enigmas and Lough Neagh

Inishowen Rivers Trust : 1st April 2021

Dr Liam Campbell, Lough Neagh Landscape Partnership



*Later in the same fields
He stood at night when eels
Moved through the grass like
hatched fears.*

Seamus Heaney





“ We put hydro-acoustic tags on some of the eels. Five signals were picked up by the researchers in Donegal which tells us that the eels know how to hang a left at the mouth of the Bann” Dr Derek Evans AFBI / QUB Fish scientist

Lough Neagh – a big heart

Largest freshwater lake in these islands

Area 150 sq miles

20 miles long x 9 miles wide

Borders six counties

Provides 60 % of our drinking water



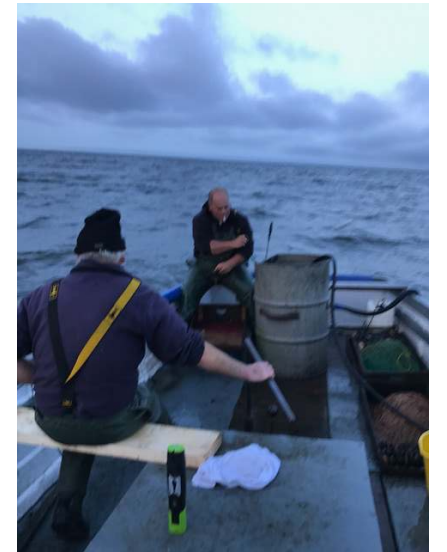


Gerry Mc Nally senior and junior

Eels - Brexit



“Landscape is an ecology of systemic interconnection, of relationship, of locality. And if all the metaphors about land, the changes resonate between the psychic and geographical landscape , inform each other, cross over ; how we inhabit the landscape is determined by our metaphors for how we live on Earth” Solnit



Anne Marie Mc Stocker
and Gary McErlain

“ Your helper needs to
be on the same
wavelength...If you
catch you earn, if you
don't catch you don't
earn. Very few people
want to work on that
basis. “



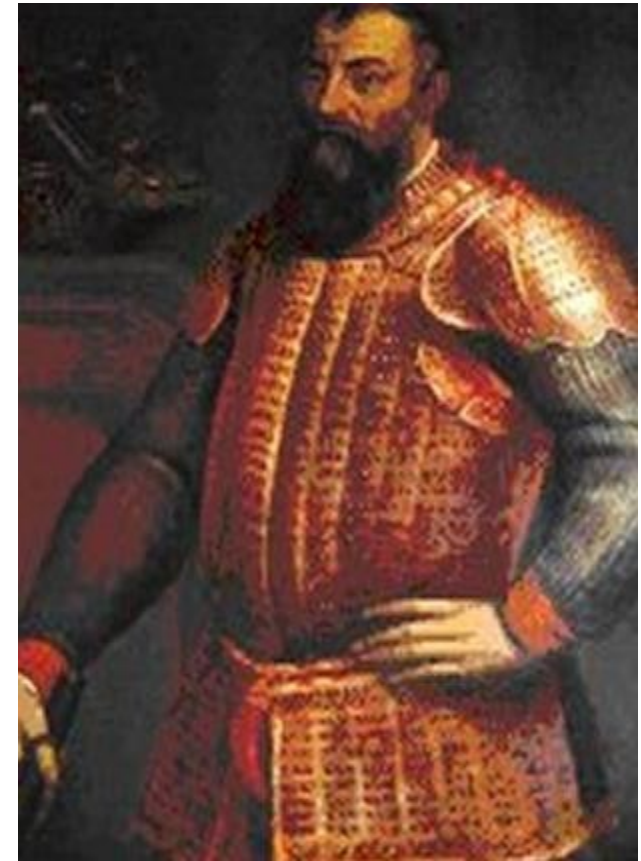
Lough Neagh
Fishermen's
Co-operative
Society



Lough Neagh
Fishermen's
Co-operative Society

The Society was established to represent the interests of local fishermen and to lobby on their behalf in an effort to regain access to fishing rights on Lough Neagh. The exclusive right to the commercial eel fishery on Lough Neagh and the Lower River Bann had been owned by *Toome Eel Fishery (NI) Ltd.* (hereafter 'the Company') since 1925, the Company's title having been traced back to a Crown grant made in 1661. Following affirmation of the Company's title in 1963 fishermen sought a means of regaining access to the fishery. Led by their Chairman, Father Oliver P. Kennedy, the fishermen were united in purpose and by 1965 were in a position to purchase a 20% shareholding in the Company. The Society was established and registered. The Society continued to build on this foundation and by 1972 had acquired outright control of the Company at which point the destiny of the eel fishery on Lough Neagh was in the hands of its fishermen.

East v West – contested place / Plantation



Title to the Fishery

- The title to the eel fishery on Lough Neagh together with the bed and soil of the Lough was granted to Lord Donegal by King Charles II in 1661.
- The title has devolved through his descendants, the Earls of Shaftesbury, to the present Shaftesbury Estate.
- The legitimacy of that title was upheld in a landmark case heard by the House of Lords in 1911.
- The eel fishing rights of L. Neagh and the River Bann were leased to Toome Eel Fishery Ltd. in 1925.

Recent History

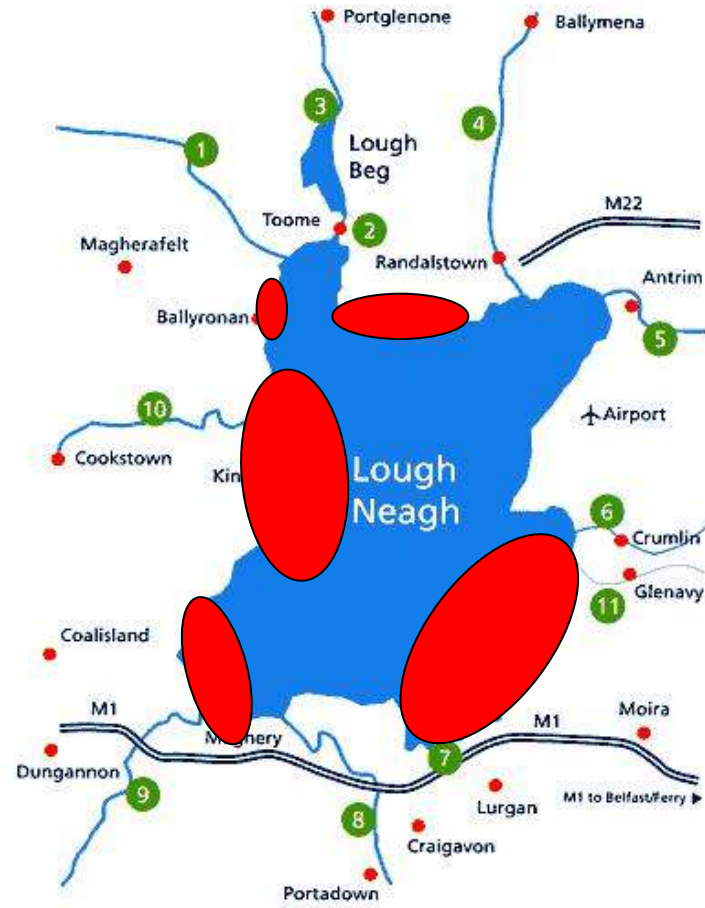
- 1959 Toome Eel Fishery Ltd. bought over by Billingsgate merchants
- 1963 Lough Neagh Fishermen's Co-operative founded
- 1965 LNFC acquired a 20% shareholding in Toome Eel Fishery (NI) Ltd.
- 1971 LNFC acquired outright control of the eel industry on L. Neagh

Current annual turnover £3.5 million.

During its life-time the Society has generated in excess £100 million for local fishing communities in addition to expenditure on services and supplies sourced on a regional basis.

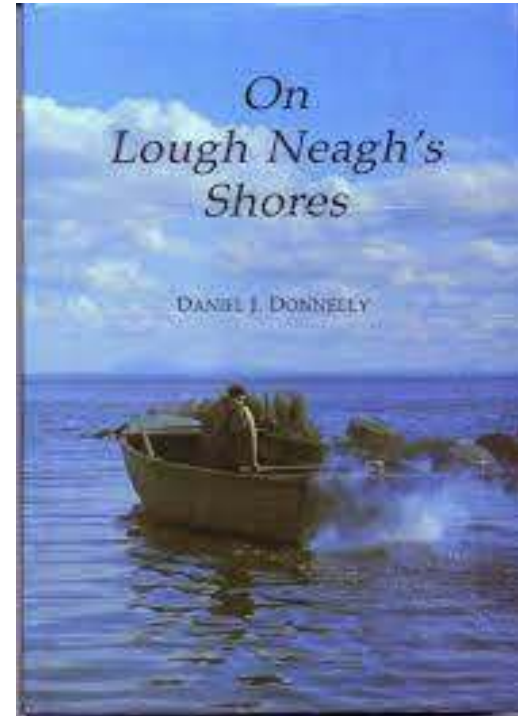
LNFC handles around 350 tonnes of brown and silver eels each year and a similar volume of scale fish. Most of these fish are destined for the European market, 80% of the eels to The Netherlands and Germany, other species mainly to France, Switzerland, Poland, Estonia and Latvia

Lough Neagh's Fishing Community



Currently there are about 125 boats each with a crew of two directly involved in eel fishing and/or scale fishing where once (30 years ago) there may have been 200 boats or more. Consider also family help in preparation of fishing gear etc. perhaps another 100 family members earning 'pin' money

The Society has just over 600 share-holding members the majority of whom are fishermen, retired fishermen or members of their extended families.



Traditional Ecological Knowledge

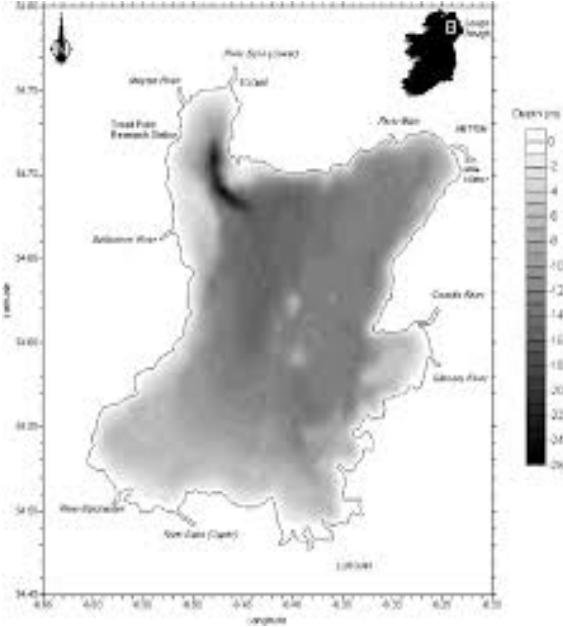


Accurate Mental Maps as an Aspect of Local Ecological Knowledge: A Case Study from Lough Neagh, Northern Ireland

John M. Sweeney, Peter J. Gilpin, David J. Fenwick, and E. Andrew G. Edgar

ABSTRACT. Accurate mental maps of Lough Neagh, Northern Ireland, were constructed from interviews with local fishermen. The maps were compared to a set of topographical maps. The maps were found to be highly accurate, and the fishermen's knowledge of the lake was found to be highly accurate. The maps were found to be highly accurate, and the fishermen's knowledge of the lake was found to be highly accurate. The maps were found to be highly accurate, and the fishermen's knowledge of the lake was found to be highly accurate.

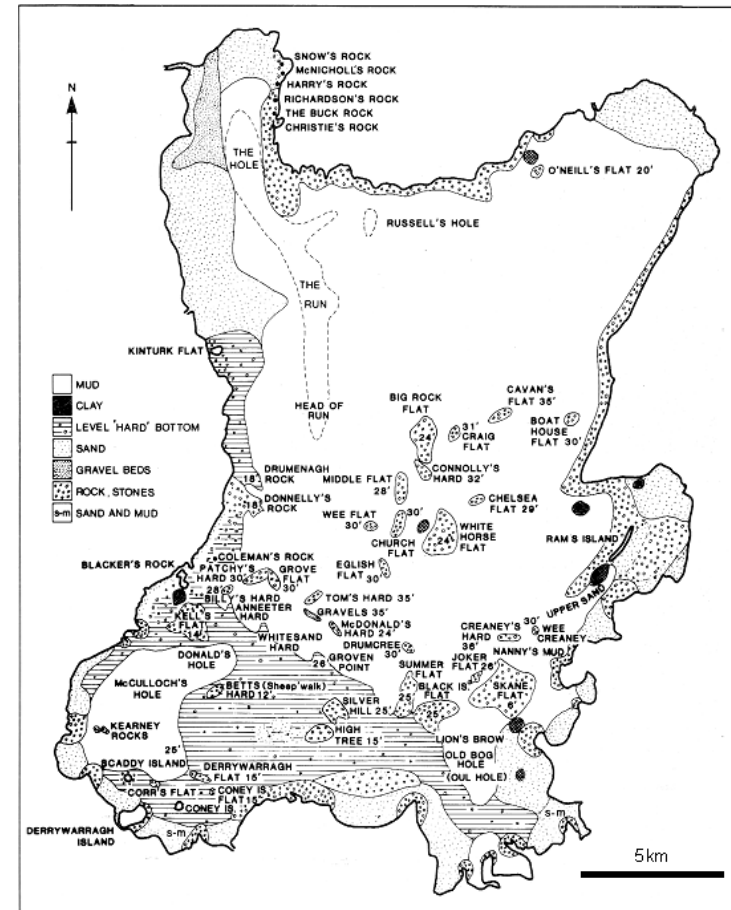
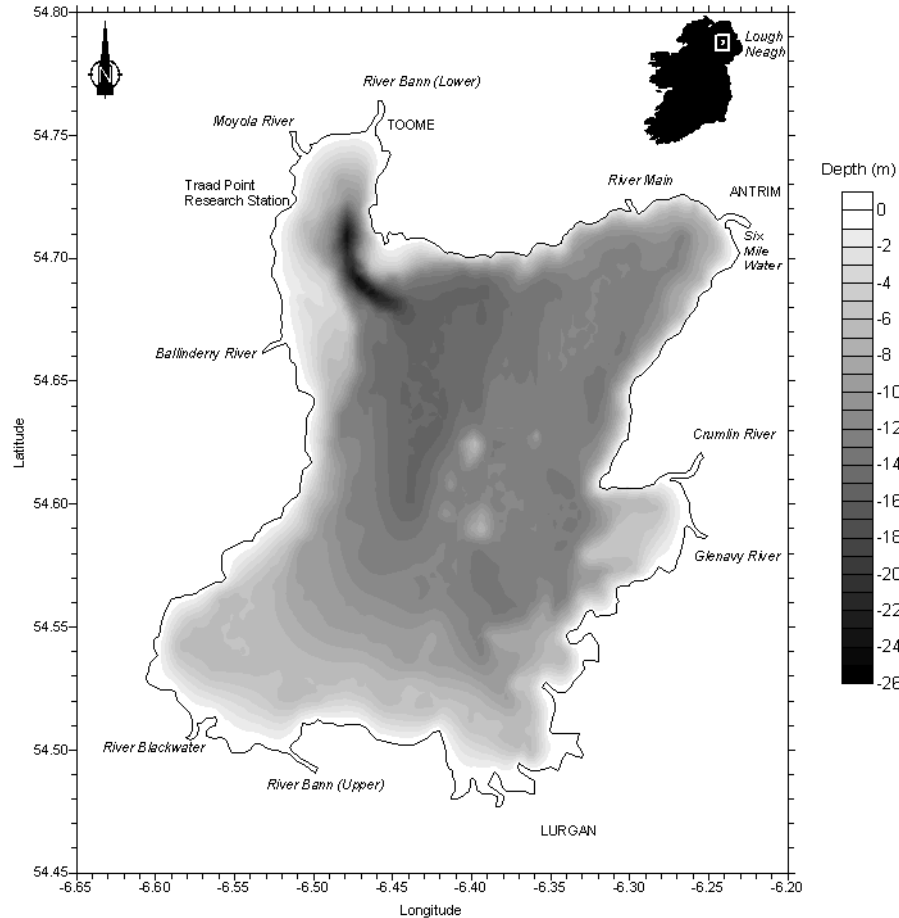
INTRODUCTION. In recent decades, there has been an increasing interest in, and regard for, traditional systems of knowledge (Pikuleva et al. 2007). In the case of traditional systems of knowledge, the fact that traditional systems of knowledge have been preserved and passed on from one generation to the next is a testament to the value of this knowledge. This knowledge is often highly accurate, and the fishermen's knowledge of the lake was found to be highly accurate.



Research

Accurate Mental Maps as an Aspect of Local Ecological Knowledge (LEK): a Case Study from Lough Neagh, Northern Ireland

John McKenna 1, Rory J. Quinn 2, Daniel J. Donnelly, and J. Andrew G. Cooper 3



Research findings

One 70 year-old fisherman emphasised when asked if he would ever retire: 'When I'm 3 days dead.'

Fishers also described deeply personal feelings that kept them fishing: 'It's in the blood. There's something there that just keeps you going.'

'It's a disease. It's a challenge. Every day is a school day out there. There's no two days the same.'

'You always get a buzz. It's not a mundane job. There's naught as good as getting a catch of eels. Good quality eels.'

'The only reason why I do it is because I've been here from a child. My dad died at 56 and I'll never forget his words to me. He was down at the hospital and he says "keep an eye on that boat because if that boat's there you'll not starve". So, I've been here ever since and that sticks in my head.

' My husband is 64 and he is one of the younger ones now. Getting up at 3.30, its in their blood. It's a passion. Even if they weren't getting paid, they'd still do it. But it doesn't pay for the young people.

Cut out harbours / quays





The Society operates a number of important ***control mechanisms*** through which it can regulate fishing intensity. These include the following:

- (a) A defined fishing season – the open season by law is from 1 May to 10 January each year with the highest fishing intensity occurring in the spring and summer months. (In practice the yellow eel season effectively winds to a close by mid-November as the weather, length of day and water temperatures become less favorable).
- (b) Placing a numerical limit upon the number of eel fishing licences issued each season.
- (c) Placing a daily limit (quota) upon the weight of eels which any one boat owner may market.





Eel supper

Protected Geographical Indication (PGI)

The award of PGI status to 'Lough Neagh Eels' (2011) is regarded by the local industry as a significant accolade recognising the heritage, tradition and authenticity of what are regarded as the best quality eels available in Europe. The Society has marketed its produce in continental Europe for more than 50 years and has developed a reputation for quality and reliability of supply. The main markets are in Holland, Germany and England.





The Society is owned and run by its members and it exists for the benefit of its members. It is, therefore, required to ensure that licence holders are able to make a reasonable living from fishing while endeavoring to secure a sustainable and viable industry for future generations. Therefore, since the Lough is a finite and currently only to some extent a replenishing natural resource, its policies are driven by an **attempt to balance the competing interests of livelihood and conservation.**

It is fact that going back 25 or more years there were more boats fishing on the lake, with up to 180 Boat Owner's Licences issued in the early 1990s compared to fewer than 110 in more recent years.

- ***The harsh reality is that the commercial eel fishing industry on Lough Neagh can no longer accommodate all those who wish to fish.***
Lough Neagh is a finite resource which if not managed responsibly would be depleted very quickly, leaving little or no return for those who fish its waters and most certainly little prospect of future generations being able to earn their livelihood from it.
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- Therefore it continues to be necessary for the Society to impose constraints, for example;
-
- on the number of boats licensed to fish
- on the intensity of fishing (by way of daily quotas)
- on permissible fishing gear
- by way of self-imposed fishing regulations.
- The Society is custodian of one of the few indigenous industries left on these islands. The industry is also of huge importance to European efforts to aid the recovery of the stock of the European eel. The Society has worked closely with DCAL (now DAERA) and the Agri-Food & Bioscience Institute for many years in an open and transparent manner including access to extensive data collated over more than five decades.

The future / Brexit !!

Barriers to young people entering the fishery mentioned by interviewees included the 'unsociable' hours of fishing, the inconsistent and seasonal nature of fishing income, the arrival of other industry in the region and the improvement in childhood education that has opened up other career opportunities to local youths.

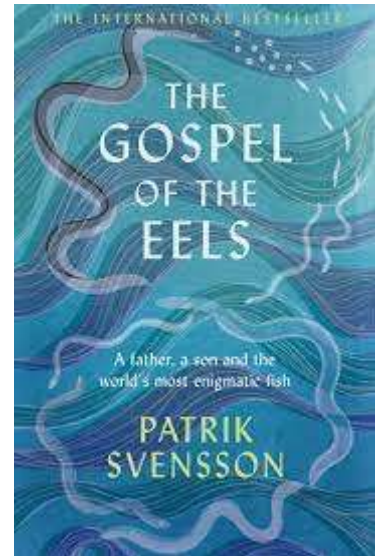
One fisherman described the changes like this: 'Years ago, you were a family around the Lough and you had six or seven in the family and it was a hard life. There was no work anywhere else. You took to the Lough. The young ones from 7 to 10 years of age they were learning to tie a hook on, learning to run a line, maybe for a couple of pounds, for pocket money. Now the young ones go to Tesco, pack shelves. So, it's a dying thing. It wouldn't be very nice to see it dying out.'

Even for younger people who would like to continue the tradition, there are obstacles. One interviewee, aged 36, had started fishing at an early age, assisting his father and grandfather. As a teenager he worked in a local sausage factory and then returned to fishing at age 21. He had fished throughout his 20s and early 30s, first with his brother and then with a cousin. For personal reasons, neither the brother nor cousin are now able to fish. This interviewee has been unable to find another fishing partner and while he continues to be a member of LNFCS and would prefer to fish full-time, he has been forced to find other work

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The Gospel of Eels – Patrick Svensson

' Two thousand years after Aristotle, the eel remains something of a scientific enigma and has become in many ways a symbol of the metaphysical...Metaphysics is not necessarily concerned with God. It is an attempt to describe the true nature of things, the whole of reality. It claims that there is a difference between existence per se and the characteristics of existence. It also claims that the two questions are separate. The eel is. Existence comes first. But what is, is a completely different matter. I think that is why the eel has continued to be a source of fascination. Because the intersection between knowledge and faith, where knowledge is incomplete and therefore allowed to contain both fact and traces of myth and imagination, is compelling. Because people who trust in science and an orderly natural world sometimes want to leave a small, small opening for the unknowable. If you are of the opinion that the eel should be allowed to remain an eel, it follows that you have to allow it to remain a mystery to some degree, For now, at least.' !



A catchment area is a naturally defined and functionally integral facet of the world's surface, unlike a parish or electoral division or county whose boundaries may or may not be given by landscape features; as such, a catchment can be taken as a microcosm of the whole. It is an open, self-renewing, dynamic system supporting and supported by a vast number of life forms and all their interrelations. Even in its most basic topography, the most skeletal and reductive representation of its geometry, is profoundly suggestive of a way of looking at the world and caring for itA river's ills may be discharged into the sea, but the way things are, we keepers of the world catchment cannot be exonerated of our responsibility (Robinson, 2006: 273).

