

New research into decline of fish stocks

» Work is under way on a Cornish river as part of an international project to try to solve the mystery of a collapse in salmon and sea trout numbers.

Fish from the River Tamar are being tagged to find out why stocks of the two species have fallen by 70% since the 1970s.

Only about 5% of young fish that leave UK rivers return as adults and spawn. Half a century ago, 15% made the return journey.

The European Union-funded £8 million SAMARCH (SAlmonid MAnagement Round the CHannel), project, led by the Game and Wildlife Conservative Trust (GWCT) involves several institutions, including the University of Exeter.

Fish from the Frome, in Somerset, and the Scorff and Bresle rivers in France are also being monitored.

The fish are fitted with acoustic beacons and a tag that records water temperature and depth.

"We have a pretty good idea where Atlantic salmon go to feed while they are at sea," said Dr Rasmus Lauridsen, head of fisheries for the GWCT.

"We have very limited knowledge about where sea trout go. We know that something is happening to both species. We want to find out what the mortality is in estuary and coastal areas."

The Tamar was chosen partly because the river had a "good amount" of data already available about fish stocks as one of the Environment Agency's 'flagship' rivers.

Fish counters that estimated the numbers of adult fish had been in operation for some time, he said. The new measures would add to that data, also contributing information about young fish leaving the rivers.

So far, a network of hydrophones has been set up in the lower Tamar, in the estuary and beyond to pick up the 'pings'. Tagging of the fish has also begun, with eight sea trout fitted with the acoustic beacons and the recording tags.

The transmitters have a range of 200 metres. The tags record temperature and pressure - giving a clue as to how deep the fish are swimming - and information about the sea journey.

The tags can be retrieved if the fish are caught by anglers on their return. A reward of £50 is offered for any whole fish and tag handed in to the Game and Wildlife Trust.



» Annie Vernon, inset top left, and Jack Richards believe the proposed stadium would be major boost for the whole of the county.

Athletes back Stadium for Cornwall funds bid

A former England test cricketer and an Olympic medalist rower have been named as ambassadors for the planned Stadium for Cornwall.

The Cornish pair, Jack Richards and Annie Vernon, have joined the project, which is bidding to secure £6 million from Cornwall Council so that work can start on the new stadium on a site near Truro.

Former cricketer Jack and rower Annie will be spearheading the launch of an extensive programme of events, touring across Cornwall throughout the spring to meet community, council and charity groups.

Annie Vernon, who won a silver medal at the 2008 Beijing Olympics, and now works as a sport writer and journalist, said of her involvement: "Cornwall

deserves a stadium to provide a focus for sport at all levels, from participation and school sport to high performance and elite.

"The stadium will be a project for everyone in the Duchy to benefit from and be proud of."

Penzance-born and raised Jack Richards, who as wicket keeper and batsman played in eight tests for England, won The Ashes in Australia in 1986-87

and played in more than 20 one-day internationals, is joining the stadium board to ensure it delivers as many benefits as possible to communities from all across Cornwall.

He said: "We need to promote sport and leisure in Cornwall and let the stadium be the heart of that, feeding and serving all areas of the Duchy."

"The multi-functional stadium

must, and will, give unique community benefits from a diverse range of sporting, recreational and socio-economic activities.

"I know that Cornwall loves success and I'm certain that the stadium will help breed that success at all levels."

Cornwall Council will have a vote on whether to provide funding for the stadium in April.

Council tax hike of 4.99% on verge of being passed

BY RICHARD WHITEHOUSE

Cornwall Council yesterday looked set to agree to raise its share of the council tax by 4.99%.

At a meeting of the full council on Tuesday it was proposed that the general increase in council tax rates will be 1.99% along with a 3% levy for adult social care.

The rise was scaled back from a previously proposed 5.99% after government provided additional funding to County Hall.

A Conservative bid to cut the increase to just 3.99% - with a

2% levy for adult social care - was rejected 69 votes to 43.

Julian German, the Cabinet member responsible for the budget, highlighted that the council had seen its funding from central government cut from £404 million in 2009 to a projected £58 million in 2021.

Mr German said that the council had listened to the public in setting the budget and had changed plans to increase the cost of transport passes for post-16 students and a move to cut funding for Citizens Advice Cornwall.

The budget had been designed to protect the most vulnerable people while also helping to provide homes and jobs for people in Cornwall.

Council leader Adam Paynter commended the budget and said that the council would be leading on the living wage and putting an extra £10 million into the pockets of the lowest paid in Cornwall.

He said that he would continue to campaign for fair funding for Cornwall from the Government and added: "I will not rest until changes have been made."

Liberal Democrat group

leader Malcolm Brown said that they would be supporting the budget and warned that an alternative put forward by Conservative councillors would put some major economic development projects at risk.

Conservative group leader Phil Seeva said that the amendment put forward by his party was to help residents by reducing their council tax bills.

He urged councillors to look at the amendment from a "different perspective" - that of residents in Cornwall and not their own political parties.

Mebyon Kernow leader Dick Cole said that his group would

be supporting the budget despite not agreeing with everything in it.

Labour group leader Tim Dwelly highlighted that the budget includes £77 million of cuts and warned that they would be "cutting into the bone of many services".

An amendment put forward by Mr Dwelly to increase funding for children's services by a total of £1 million was lost by 85 votes to five, with 11 abstentions.

The final vote on the budget had not been made as the Cornish Guardian went to press.