

By **Rory Reynolds**

WILD salmon could vanish from many of Scotland's rivers unless drastic action is taken to preserve the species, a conservation body has warned.

The Atlantic Salmon Trust, whose patron is the Prince of Wales, said that salmon could disappear from many rivers within just 30 years unless steps are taken to protect the species.

Tony Andrews, the organisation's chief executive, said that the threat could still be reversed, and urged government ministers to pursue a "blueprint for the survival of Scottish salmon" to help to protect the country's £120million salmon angling industry.

Andrews' comments, which urged stricter regulation on the industry, are believed to have the support of the Prince Charles, and of the Duke of Westminster, president of the Atlantic Salmon Trust.

Genetically pure populations of wild salmon in Scotland, which are hugely lucrative to the Scottish economy, have survived since the Ice Age, but are now in danger of extinction. Mixed stock fisheries, which allow fisherman to use their nets indiscriminately in coastal waters, are being blamed for the threat to wild salmon stocks.

Fears

Last month rural affairs secretary Richard Lochhead supported an application to secure food name status from the EU for wild Scottish Salmon, as Scotch Beef and Scotch Lamb already have.

However, there are fears that the status could inflate wild salmon prices and encourage fishermen to maximise catches, further threatening the species.

Andrews said that some of Scotland's rivers were "at best holding the line", while in others like Balgy in Wester Ross "we are seeing a continuing decline in the number of returning fish".

He said: "If we continue with the current poor levels of management of aquaculture and mixed stocks exploitation, is it unlikely that our grandchildren will be able to fish for wild salmon or sea trout in Scotland.

"We are not fulfilling basic conservation measures to manage this incredibly important resource to Scotland and I don't think politicians have grasped this.

Parasites

"We have to find a way of working alongside the aquaculture industry to manage diseases and parasites."

The Scottish government has been criticised for being too lenient on the fish-farming industry, allowing the existence of one salmon louse for every two salmon.

The high rate of disease in farmed fish is said have a devastating affect on young wild fish like salmon.

Also currently in Scotland the practice of allowing salmon to be reared on smolts in open pens, which is banned in Norway, allows some farmed fish to escape and contaminate wild salmon stocks.

So far this year around 10,000 farmed fish escaped from Scottish lochs like the Ness, Arkaig and Lochy.