Dear Sir,

I am sure that all those who fish for salmon and sea trout will have been delighted with the publication of the new Salmon and Sea Trout Protection Byelaws 2018, which were approved by the Minister, George Eustice, just before Christmas and published in the New Year. The most significant elements of the new Byelaws concern the North East Coast net fishery.

This fishery consisted of a small number of drift netsmen who resisted the 2003 buyout and a number of coastal netsmen using T & J nets. This fishery was responsible for most of the migratory fish netted off the English coast and regularly killed c15,000 salmon and c40,000 sea trout, most of the latter being taken by the T&J nets.

Under the new Byelaws, the drift net fishery has been closed and the T&J netting season significantly shortened with only sea trout to be taken before first June. Off the Northumberland coast the nets will stop on 31st May rather than 31st August, although there will be no restriction on netting in the “Conservation Boxes”, which cover the coast close to river mouths. So far so good and such an approach should provide a significant boost to east coast rivers, particularly in regard to sea trout.

However, it has emerged that all might not be as good as it seems. The Environment Agency (EA) is going to run a trial of a new type of coastal net, which apparently only catches sea trout, with salmon being able to swim safely through. All existing T&J netsmen will be eligible to participate in this trial. Those participating will be able to fish for the length of the old netting season. The EA says that this trial will be “closely monitored” but cant say exactly how, nor does it seem that any additional resources will be provided to ensure that this trial is scientifically robust.

Sadly, I fear that these new Byelaws will do nothing to prevent the wholesale slaughter of our precious sea trout along the North East coast.

Yours