

AN ANGLING TRUST PROPOSAL ON

# RECREATIONAL FISHING

Guidance to Ministers on permitting angling as a safe activity for mental and physical wellbeing during the COVID-19 crisis.



#WHENWEFISHAGAIN



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## INTRODUCTION



The Angling Trust has been steadfast in its support for our NHS and co-operated fully with Government's measures to combat the spread of COVID-19. We wanted to ensure that our sport played its part in the nationwide effort to contain the spread of this dreadful virus.

We have redeployed our staff to run a special COVID help and advice line to inform fisheries and angling related businesses what they can and cannot do and what assistance is available to them. We have liaised with the police to ensure the correct interpretation of the Coronavirus Regulations defining essential travel and confirming what work might be permissible on fisheries.

However, as lifelong anglers we both know that the majority of anglers practise self-isolation and social distancing as a matter of course. Large crowds and successful fishing don't mix and anglers tend to seek solitude even in normal circumstances.

With the Government now actively considering what activities and which restrictions could safely be considered for early lifting we judged that the time was right to present these proposals to ministers ahead of the next review. Our job is not to say when such a move could be made - that's clearly the role of Ministers acting on medical and scientific advice. Our job is to set out the how and the why which is precisely what this report does.

We demonstrate that angling in the UK could be permitted as a safe, healthy, beneficial outdoor activity and why it should take its position at the front of the queue when restrictions are reviewed. Through our work with other angling bodies, in this country and across the globe, as well as by consulting with experts across multiple disciplines - we have delivered a set of phased guidelines under which angling could be safely permitted without increasing the risk of COVID-19 transmission when the Government begins to ease restrictions.

We are both extremely grateful to our network of contacts and experts here in Britain and across Europe who have given us their time and experience to help us build a case on behalf of the angling community. We would particularly draw attention to the figures in appendix 1 which show that where limited forms of angling have been allowed to continue there have not been any negative impacts.

We all appreciate the huge benefits that angling brings to our health and well-being, as well as the economic and social impact our sport delivers. Through this report the Angling Trust is demonstrating that there is a safe and sensible pathway to get us back on the bank without compromising the NHS or the country's fight against this dreadful Coronavirus.

We commend our report to Government and look forward to their response.

**Jamie Cook**  
Chief Executive  
Angling Trust

**Martin Salter**  
Head of Policy  
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Rt Hon Michael Gove MP  
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster  
Cabinet Office  
70 Whitehall  
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21<sup>st</sup> April 2020

Dear Mr Gove,

I write as the CEO of the Angling Trust, the National Governing Body for recreational fishing. We have supported the government's position and guidance throughout the COVID-19 crisis with the clear message that anglers should stay at home and stay safe.

We understand the government's own scientists have recently advised that the lifting of restrictions on outdoor activities such as angling would not result in a rise of the infection rate above the all-important R1 figure. As you and your colleagues work towards safe and measured options for permitted activities the enclosed 12-point plan, entitled *Recreational Fishing: A social distancing activity with important mental health benefits that can be permitted as covid-19 guidance is reviewed*, lays out the guidelines under which we believe recreational fishing can offer enormous benefits in combating the mental health crisis we are likely to face in the coming months.

In many ways fishing already complies with the government's guidelines – it is a naturally self-isolating pastime that is practised alone, outdoors in conditions which require social distancing to take place.

Recreational fishing transcends social and physical boundaries, engages able-bodied and disabled participants alike, and with the majority of the population living within 5 miles of a waterway it can safely and practically be achieved without significant travel.

There is a large amount of evidence of the benefits angling has on both physical and mental health – it is prescribed by a number of NHS trusts as a proven therapy for mental wellbeing, and numerous military charities and organisations to combat PTSD.

Importantly, with both the government and Sport England working hard to ensure individuals remain active, 62 per cent of angling's participants identify the sport as the only physical activity they take. Enabling individuals to safely fish will have a positive impact on those who perhaps cannot run or cycle, and who are at greater risk of inactivity and the associated mental health challenge. For many, this is their only exercise.

It is for these reasons that as you consider a positive means to move forward we offer a safe, credible, proven, and evidence-based solution.

The enclosed guidance is firmer than the regulations operating in Germany, Holland, Norway, Denmark, Czech Republic, Ireland and other countries who have allowed angling to continue as a safe and beneficial activity throughout this period. Significantly, as the enclosed document demonstrates, those countries who have continued to permit recreational angling have also been among the most successful in limiting the spread of the Coronavirus. Angling is a low risk, outdoor activity that government could permit without risk of increasing transmission rates of COVID-19.

As detailed in the document fishing is self-policing. We have an existing and established regional community network of 500 trained voluntary bailiffs with an infrastructure for qualifying and reporting rural crime and pollution incidents to the Environment Agency and Police. Recreational fishing in England and Wales is directly licensed by the government and, therefore, we can ensure that our participation is closely monitored and that these guidelines are adhered to.

Finally, recreational angling has a positive impact on the economy and contributes circa £4bn per year in the UK. The European Angler's Alliance notes that in Holland, where fishing has remained permitted, the contribution to the economy has nearly trebled in 2020 with licence sales increasing by over 30 per cent. There is every reason to expect a considerable economic boost once angling resumes in the UK.

The Angling Trust has stood firmly behind the government in its messaging on COVID-19 and we will continue to do so – we have provided guidance to regional police forces who are referencing our position in their actions.

*When We Fish Again* is supported by our partner organisations including Salmon & Trout Conservation, Canal & River Trust, Angling Trades Association and the Institute of Fisheries Management. It is strongly evidence-based and draws on experience from other European countries. The arguments set out in this paper could equally apply to a number of other outdoor sports and activities that can be undertaken without compromising social distancing and adhere to the government's five-point plan.

We look forward to hearing from you

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jamie Cook', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Jamie Cook  
CEO – Angling Trust

Encs/...



# RECREATIONAL FISHING

## A SOCIAL DISTANCING ACTIVITY WITH IMPORTANT MENTAL HEALTH BENEFITS THAT CAN BE PERMITTED AS COVID-19 GUIDANCE IS REVIEWED

***Guidance to Ministers on permitting angling as a safe activity for mental and physical wellbeing during the COVID-19 crisis.***

### **Key Points:**

- Angling is naturally a self-isolating, social distancing sport and could be allowed as a “permitted activity” under the government’s current guidance.
- Angling transcends social and physical boundaries, engages able bodied and disabled participants and with well over half the population living within 5 miles of a waterway it can safely and practically be achieved without significant travel.
- There is a large amount of evidence of the important benefits angling has on both physical and mental health – it is prescribed by a number of NHS trusts as a proven therapy for mental wellbeing as well as numerous military charities and organisations to combat PTSD.
- 62% of angling’s participants identify fishing as the only physical activity they take. Fishing offers a safe route to combat inactivity and the associated mental health challenges for many.
- We have collaborated with other bodies, scientific experts and clinicians to propose the below guidelines that would ensure that angling could be safely permitted without increasing the risk of COVID-19 transmission.
- This guidance is not only in accordance with, but is firmer than, the restrictions under which the governments of Germany, Netherlands, Norway, Denmark, Ireland and others have allowed and advocated angling as a safe and beneficial activity throughout this period of social restrictions.
- Angling contributes circa £4billion per year to the economy in the UK. In the Netherlands the contribution of angling to the economy has nearly trebled already in 2020 where fishing has been permitted throughout lockdown.

*Going fishing is a safe and healthy outdoor activity for all ages and physical capabilities, which requires social distancing and is a great way of teaching children about nature and the importance of our environment.*



## It would be safe to permit fishing

We understand that the **Government's own scientists** have recently advised that the lifting of restrictions on outdoor activities such as angling **would not result in a rise of the infection rate above the R1 figure.**

Angling is, by definition a self-isolating and social distancing sport. It is likely that many anglers will not see another person during their time on the water.

94% of the population live within 5 miles of a waterway and therefore fishing can be practised under the current restrictions without significant travel in line with the government's current guidance on activity.

By increasing the availability of rivers, lakes and streams as recreational areas **some pressure will be released from other public open spaces** making social distancing objectives easier to achieve across communities.

## Health benefits to permitting angling

We are facing an unprecedented emergency in mental health.

Studies have shown the clear benefits of angling on the personal and mental health of populations recovering from stress.

*"It is evident that participation in angling – can have a positive effect on personal health and well-being, most notably as means by which an individual can escape or recover from stress, trouble or illness."*

*The Social and Community Benefits of Angling - Dr. Paul Stolk*

Angling is prescribed by a number of NHS trusts as a proven therapy for mental wellbeing as well as numerous military charities and organisations to combat PTSD.

Importantly, with both the government and Sport England working hard to ensure individuals remain active, 62% of angling's participants identify the sport as the only physical activity they take.

Enabling individuals to safely fish will have a positive impact on those who perhaps cannot run or cycle and who are therefore at greater risk of inactivity and the associated mental health challenges.

Offering a naturally isolating, individual pastime which engages participants with the outdoors will deliver wellbeing benefits without risking an increase in infection rate.

## Other countries are safely permitting fishing

Based on evidence from across Europe recreational fishing could be prescribed as a permitted activity under current government guidance with confidence that it would not increase risk of transmission of COVID-19.

There is no correlation between COVID-19 related deaths and recreational fishing being permitted – quite the opposite is true. (See Appendix 1)

Analysis by the Angling Trust using the latest data from *Worldometers.info* shows that countries including Germany, Netherlands, Denmark, Ireland, Czech Republic and Norway **where fishing is permitted are recording significantly lower death tolls than many nations where recreational fishing is banned.** We have researched the measures adopted by other European Countries who have allowed recreational fishing to continue in some form through the current crisis and developed a robust set of guidelines to reflect and build upon international best practice. (See Appendix 2)

The evidence supports the view that **permitting recreational angling would not hinder the government's attempts to limit the spread of the Coronavirus** whilst delivering significant economic, social, health and wellbeing benefits.



*Fishing provides significant economic, social, health and wellbeing benefits*

## Fishing is self-policing

David Bellamy described anglers as custodians of the country's waterways and without that presence on the banks instances of rural crime have increased significantly.

Freshwater angling in England and Wales is well regulated through the requirement to hold a government fishing licence which can be removed from transgressors. The Angling Trust has a national Voluntary Bailiff Service (VBS) that works alongside the Environment Agency's Fisheries Enforcement staff. In addition, clubs have their own appointed bailiffs and fishery managers. These 500 voluntary bailiffs alone delivered 28,000 hours of community volunteering in the past year and have an established and highly successful reporting mechanism with both the Police and Environment Agency to ensure that incidents of rural crime, poaching and pollution are professionally logged and prioritised.

The Angling Trust has been working with the Environment Agency, DEFRA and the GB Non Native Species Secretariat to promote the '*Check, Clean, Dry*' bio-security message to anglers for several years and so angling is already ahead of other sports when it comes to the awareness of avoiding cross-contamination.

Permitting recreational angling would decrease rural crime and reduce pressure on police enforcement services.

## The economic benefit to permitting angling

There would be significant economic benefits in allowing fishing as a "permitted activity" without increasing the risk of transmission of COVID-19.

**Angling is one of the UK's most popular pastimes and makes an important contribution to the UK economy, generating £4 billion annually and supporting 40,000 jobs** in manufacturing, distribution, retailing and fishery management.

The Government's own report *Sea Angling 2012* acknowledged the economic contribution of recreational sea angling. It estimated that **sea anglers alone contribute £1.23 billion p.a. into the economy and upon which 10,400 full time jobs are dependent**. If induced and indirect impacts are taken into account, these figures rise to £2.1 billion and 23,600 jobs.

The European Anglers Alliance note that in Holland, where fishing has remained permitted throughout the COVID-19 period the contribution to the economy has nearly trebled already in 2020.





## **Proposed guidelines for safe, permitted fishing**

The Angling Trust supports a phased or 'traffic light' approach to the lifting of the COVID-19 restrictions. We have produced guidelines for the phased resumption of recreational fishing.

### **Phase One (For Immediate Review)**

Recreational angling on lakes, rivers and sea to be added to the list of permissible activities subject to the following guidelines:

1. Angling to be undertaken on a solitary basis - social distancing in accordance with government guidelines must be maintained at all times
2. Local fishing only – anglers must follow current government guidance on travel for the benefit of recreational activity
3. All freshwater anglers must be in possession of the relevant EA Fishing licence
4. Sea angling from beach and shore to resume along with small scale private boat fishing.
5. No sharing of fishing tackle or any other items
6. No sharing of fishing positions (swims) except by members of the same household
7. No angler to fish within 15 metres of any other angler
8. No keepnets or competition fishing
9. Online and electronic day ticket payments to be made wherever possible
10. Onsite shared facilities such as cafes and clubhouses to remain closed
11. Fisheries unable to adhere to these guidelines should remain closed until further notice
12. Anyone displaying symptoms of COVID-19, or who shares a household with any individual displaying symptoms, should not go fishing and should continue to follow government advice on isolation

### **Phase Two**

- Private and guided boat and kayak fishing to resume on rivers, lakes and reservoirs\*
- Competition fishing should only be undertaken if compliant with all government guidelines and in accordance with the Angling Trust's existing best practice COVID-19 guidance - <https://www.getfishing.org.uk/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-angling-events-competitions/>
- Charter boat fishing to resume under strict guidelines. Boat skippers must ensure that social distancing is always possible by limiting numbers on charter boats if not members of the same household\*\*

- Shared facilities at fisheries to re-open
- Travel restrictions to be reviewed to facilitate outdoor recreation in line with government priorities

### **Phase Three**

- Angling to continue as normal whilst adhering to any social distancing guidelines that may be in force

\* Currently 'non-essential' boat movements are prohibited by the Environment Agency, Canal and River Trust and other navigation authorities.

\*\* The Professional Boatman's Association is producing Social Distancing Guidelines for their sector.

### **Further points**

The fishing tackle trade continues to trade online – wherever possible transactions should be made digitally however in order to collect bait and essential items shops could re-open under strict social distancing measures employed within the retail sector.

Angling has a good safety record, allowing recreational fishing is unlikely to add any additional burden to the NHS through angling related injuries.

The arguments set out in this paper could equally apply to a number of other outdoor sports and activities that can be undertaken without compromising social distancing.

### **In conclusion**

**Angling is a largely solitary sport with minimal risk of spreading contagion, it delivers proven benefits to both physical health and mental wellbeing to individuals who in many cases would not otherwise maintain activity.**

**This proposal provides the basis for a safe, limited, resumption of our sport which will deliver huge benefits to the mental health and general well-being of many thousands of individuals who have been cooped up inside for several weeks in stressful circumstances. This is an easily manageable and monitorable policy which requires no additional resource.**

**This paper has been produced in consultation with our partners and experts from all angling disciplines. Our recommendations have been reviewed by medical, legal and scientific professionals and draws upon best practice and experience from across Europe.**

**Having positively and proactively promoted the government's instructions and guidance to the angling community throughout this period the Angling Trust are confident that permitting recreational fishing under these conditions would not increase the risk of COVID-19 transmission.**

## Notes for reference

### The Angling Trust

The Angling Trust is the national governing body for recreational fishing representing all disciplines of angling, as both a competitive sport and an important leisure and cultural activity. We have thousands of individual members and hundreds of thousands of members of affiliated clubs. We represent more than 2,000 of the many angling clubs, fisheries and riparian owners throughout the UK, whose fishing rights are worth in excess of £1 billion.

### Doing the right thing

Angling has followed both the advice and the rules issued by Government to stop all non-essential journeys and to observe the guidance in order to stop the spread of the COVID-19 virus and to support the valiant endeavours of our NHS. Following the Prime Minister's announcement of further restrictions on March 23<sup>rd</sup>, the Angling Trust issued the following statement:

*"We must all do what is required of us by the Government and work together to fight this pandemic. Therefore, until further notice, we should all refrain from fishing. This is about saving lives and supporting the NHS."*

We quickly established a [COVID-19 information hub](#) to update the whole of the angling community on the latest government advice and to offer support and guidance to angling clubs and fisheries.

Our Chief Executive Jamie Cook then wrote an open letter to all our member clubs and fisheries and to all individual members of the Angling Trust saying:

*"With regard to the current restrictions announced by the Government on Monday 23 March 2020 it is clear that the only permitted activities that have been specified are walking, running and cycling for the purpose of local daily exercise. Today we have written to the Sports Minister highlighting the benefits to both physical health and mental wellbeing that angling provides and that we are ready and prepared to offer whatever support the government or Sport England require now or in the future to get people back fishing as soon as is safely possible."*

*"We have had thousands of visits to our dedicated COVID-19 information hub and the phone lines have not stopped ringing since we launched. The Angling Trust is here to support the entire community and will next week be delivering dedicated content alongside partners to help all anglers maintain the fishing habit and as much as possible bring the ethos of the sport we love into your homes."*

*"I want to personally thank anglers, angling clubs and fisheries for taking strong and decisive action in the face of an unprecedented public health challenge. We have come together as a community and your support has been nothing short of fantastic. I thank you for doing your bit in staying inside, saving lives and supporting our NHS."*



## Approach to the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport

The Angling Trust letter to the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport offered our whole-hearted support and looked to the future and to what will become a pressing need to allow people to resume safe outdoor activities when the time is right.

We said:

*“Angling is a solitary pastime, it is an effective way of supporting people with a range of conditions, being accessible to those with physical disabilities and those who suffer from anxiety, depression and mental health issues. We work closely with the NHS and military veterans’ organisations through a number of projects supporting these groups.*

*“Should the Government feel it is able to lift some of the restrictions...or deem this style of individual, self-distancing activity a beneficial solution in the current climate, we would welcome the opportunity to work with you on helping to encourage angling as one of the ways people can begin to leave their homes in a safe and appropriate way. In addition, when as a nation, we come through this crisis, as we will, we would be very keen to work with you, and bodies such as Sport England and the NHS, in helping to get our nations active once more, and as importantly, in helping people to take steps to improve their mental health, which will inevitably come under some stress in coming weeks and months.”*

We are pleased to confirm that this paper enjoys the in principle support of the **Angling Trades Association, Institute of Fisheries Management, Salmon & Trout Conservation, the Canal & River Trust.**



### Angling Trust – April 21st 2020

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## Appendix 1 - Comparisons with other European Countries

Country	Fishing banned	Covid-19 Deaths
Italy	Y	23660
Spain	Y	20453
France	Y	19718
UK	Y	16060
Belgium	Y	5683
Germany	N	4642
Netherlands	N	3684
Ireland	N	610
Denmark	N	355
Czech Republic	N	188
Norway	N	165

Figures correct at 10.00am 20/04/2020



## Appendix 2

### Germany

In Germany people are allowed to fish, as long as they do not group up and stick to social distancing rules. Recently fishing tackle shops were allowed to reopen to serve anglers.

### Netherlands

23/3/20 – Cabinet announcement  
Until 1st June all events of any size prohibited – this includes fishing matches/coaching/meetings etc. and other events within recreational fishing. However, recreational fishing is extremely important so you must abide by these rules;  
Individual recreational anglers who want to get their fresh air/exercise are required to follow these rules;

- Go fishing alone (including if on a boat)
- Preferably select your fishing spot in a rural location to encounter as few a people as possible
- Always stick to the minimum distance rules and other government guidance
- STAY SAFE!
- These rules are extremely important but we and the government understand the value of fishing so please ensure that these guidelines are followed. Stick to these rules, stay healthy and we look forward to fishing as normal again soon.

### Denmark

- Keep distance: Keep at least 2m away from others - even when you are outdoors.
- Good hand hygiene: Wash hands and use hand sanitiser. Keep hand sanitiser with you in the car and in your jacket.
- Fish locally: As far as possible, avoid traveling far to fish. If you need to travel far then bring food, equipment, etc. from home so you don't have to buy at the destination - to avoid spreading the virus across the country.
- Fish as far as possible alone: Fish as far as possible alone, or eventually, only with others from your household.
- Whenever possible, drive alone: If you are fishing with people other than those from your household, arrange individual transportation.
- Do not fish with particularly vulnerable people: Do not go fishing with elderly or other vulnerable people as they are particularly at risk of becoming seriously ill if infected with the coronavirus / COVID-19.

### Norway

As per Denmark  
Plus - Anglers shall avoid travelling that results in being over-night another place than home

## Croatia

Fishing is allowed all over the country. You are not allowed to fish in bigger groups (2 person per swim is ok, but no more), fishing during the night is not allowed at the moment. You are not allowed to move freely all over the country, only in your county, so fishing in local lakes or rivers is the only option.

## Slovenia

Fishing is allowed in most of the lakes and rivers and has been allowed since the start of the crisis. Night fishing is allowed. No large groups of people in the same swim.

## Slovakia

Fishing in most of the lakes and rivers has been allowed since the start of the crisis. Fishing during the night is allowed.

## Hungary

Fishing is allowed in most of the lakes and rivers and has been since the start of the crisis. No large groups of people in the same swim, fishing during the night is allowed.

## Czech Republic

Fishing is allowed in most of the lakes and rivers and has been allowed since the start of the crisis. No large groups of people in the same swim, fishing during the night is allowed

## Ireland

- Avoid crowded areas and reduce social interactions
- Anglers should remain 2m apart from one another and members of the public.
- Routinely use hand hygiene before and after touching common infrastructure (Gates, Stiles etc)
- Fish for a brief period only.
- Fish in a location less than or equal to 2km from home.
- Driving to fish is considered not essential travel therefore it is not permitted to drive to this location.

