

FISHING OUT OF LOCKDOWN

A submission to DCMS and the
Cabinet Office from the Angling Trust



Angling has been one of the few sporting success stories amid the three national lockdowns and other Covid restrictions. Along with golf and a small number of other outdoor recreational activities, angling was the first to benefit from the easing of restrictions announced by the Prime Minister in May 2020 as we came out of the first lockdown. This followed the submission of a comprehensive set of *When We Fish Again* proposals to Government from the Angling Trust with the support of partner organisations including the Angling Trades Association, Canal & River Trust, Institute of Fisheries Management and Salmon & Trout Conservation. These set out how angling could safely resume in accordance with national public health guidance supported by a full set of Covid compliant guidelines covering all aspects of the sport.

[Full details can be found here](#)

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Angling and Covid

Since May 13th 2020 angling has been both lawful and encouraged by government guidance. This has continued albeit with limitations through each revision of the Covid restrictions, including the Tier System and the Second and Third National Lockdowns. At every stage the Angling Trust updated the guidelines for our sport in consultation with Sport England and relevant Government departments. (See appendix 1)

We were pleased that the Government agreed to permit and encourage individual outdoor recreation to continue so that those who were initially restricted in the first lockdown could once again participate in individual, socially distanced outdoor recreational activity. This delivered huge benefits to those whose recreation is not narrowly confined to running, walking or cycling. Experience has shown that socially distanced outdoor recreation such as angling is a safe and responsible activity and that its continuation does not contribute to the spread of infection.

Our Covid compliant guidelines have been widely accepted across angling and to the best of our knowledge there have been no known examples where angling activity has contributed to the spread of the virus. In fact, the multiple benefits are apparent not only in terms of individual health and mental wellbeing during these difficult times but in reducing pressure on parks, footpaths and other open spaces where people would otherwise gather if prohibited from pursuing their chosen pastimes.

Whilst angling is not alone as an individual form of outdoor recreation it has a number of key benefits which ensure it can remain part of the solution during this challenging period:

- being a largely solitary sport where social distancing occurs naturally
- proven benefits for mental health and physical well-being
- angling appeals to people of all ages and backgrounds and engages able-bodied and disabled participants alike
- evidence that non-contact outdoor activities will not increase infection rates
- a reduction in pressure on other public open spaces

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Economic Benefit

The decision by Ministers not to place unnecessary restrictions on angling has undoubtedly protected the £4bn a year angling trade which supports up to 40,000 jobs in the UK. In fact, since May last year there has been a near 20% increase in rod licence sales, significant rises in angling club membership and a corresponding boost in sales of fishing tackle, outdoor clothing and ancillary products. This has been welcome news indeed at a time when many other businesses are facing financial ruin.

However, the Tier 4 restrictions on charter boat fishing and competition fishing did have an impact on a number of businesses as did the Tier 3 & 4 travel restrictions on outdoor sport and recreation as a whole.

And the current restrictions under the Third National Lockdown have seen angling further restricted to very local fishing only under the 'daily exercise' provisions and this has had both an economic and social impact. We look forward to being able to open up opportunities for all forms of angling when the Government judges that it is safe to ease back on some of the current restrictions that are in place.

Fishing out of Lockdown

Recreational fishing has been practised safely and responsibly in England since May 13th in accordance with the approved Covid compliant guidelines produced by the Angling Trust. The welcome reduction in infection rates opens up the opportunity for a full return to outdoor, grassroots sports as originally announced by the DCMS Secretary Oliver Dowden on November 23rd but shelved soon after in the Third National Lockdown. [Read announcement](#)

The Angling Trust firmly believes that the Government's instincts were correct and that it is important to encourage people to take their essential recreation in a safe, socially distanced outdoor environment as opposed to a crowded indoor situation.

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We need to move as quickly as possible to opening up safe outdoor recreation along the lines of last summer in order to deliver health, well-being, social and economic benefits. Our preference is for a national system but should the Government decide to retain a tiered system of restrictions the Angling Trust has appropriate guidelines in place to drive compliance.

Key Points

Travel

- The Angling Trust contends that travel for organised sport and outdoor recreation should not be subject to restriction should tiered restrictions remain in place.
- Unfortunately, the reality for residents in many urban Tier 3 & 4 areas is that their return to grassroots sport was confined to their own local authority boundaries making many competitive activities, which require an element of travel, unviable.
- This could be resolved with a simple amendment to the Government's guidance so that the exceptions for travel would read: "... for work, education, youth services, **[organised sport and outdoor recreation]**, to receive medical treatment, or because of caring responsibilities."

Unlimited Outdoor Recreation

- From May 2020 until January 2021 no time limits were placed on outdoor recreation or sport. This enabled sports such as angling which take place at all times to continue without restriction.
- Much of the current permitted 'daily exercise' takes place after nightfall, particularly during the winter months when people are at work during daylight hours. There is no reason why angling should not take place on the same basis.
- The Angling Trust is simply seeking a return to the successful provisions of last May which saw night fishing practised without problem.

A return to competitive fishing

- In consultation with the match fishing community the Angling Trust drew up Covid compliant guidelines which avoided any 'gathering' of individuals, maintained social distancing and ensured that no equipment was shared during the course of any competition. This guidance was reviewed by DCMS and on this basis angling was the first sport to return to competition on 26th May 2020.

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- The draws for fishing positions (pegs) were made online and winnings were paid out via BACS to eliminate any contact.
- Pro-forma risk assessments were distributed to assist compliance.
- Until the introduction of the Tier 3 & 4 restrictions match fishing was able to operate effectively and safely and we would like to return to these provisions.
- In terms of public health there is little difference in 20 individuals attending a fishery as individuals for a days socially distanced fishing and 20 anglers doing the same but entering their catches into a competitive process at the end of the day.
- From May - November 2020 these best practice guidelines were adopted by competition organisers to ensure that, to the best of our knowledge, these unique competitions which involve no form of gathering or personal contact did not impact negatively upon infection rates.
- The Angling Trust wishes to see a return to the successful Covid compliant competition fishing of last year.

Charter Boat Fishing

- Working with the Professional Boatman's Association, the Angling Trust has produced Covid compliant guidelines to ensure the safe operation of socially distanced boat fishing under the supervision of professional skippers.
- The sector is ready to resume operations with appropriate risk assessments and safety briefings all prepared and ready for implementation.

Summary

Recreational fishing has provided a valuable lifeline for many thousands of people of all ages, abilities and backgrounds throughout this pandemic. It has been conducted safely and responsibly with strong guidelines in place covering every aspect of our sport. There are multiple benefits to be had in permitting a full return as soon as any restrictions can be lifted.

Angling Trust

11th February 2021

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The Angling Trust submission is supported by high profile angling experts from all branches of the sport. Please register your support for the full resumption of fishing when lockdown restrictions are eased by going to www.anglingtrust.net/fishingoutoflockdown

Korda Carp Specialist and Broadcaster Ali Hamidi

When fishing was allowed back last May, along with Night Fishing, and Match Fishing a couple of weeks later, the 'R' value across the country continued to be driven down by the nation. We are primarily an isolated outdoor pursuit and that means whether someone fishes for one day or three nights consecutively in their bivvy, it needs only the same amount of travel time. Along with the low risk factor of fishing, the benefits for the



many include not only physical health improvements, but more importantly vitality for mental health.

England Match Angler Steve Ringer Angling has proven to be a real lifeline to people throughout this pandemic, so when restrictions start to lift I really see no reason why fishing shouldn't be included and even encouraged.



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Specialist Angler Dai Gribble

All the evidence indicates that angling presents an extremely low risk of spreading Coronavirus. I would welcome the current restrictions being lifted to allow anglers to fully benefit from all the positives angling provides in these difficult times.



Sea Angling Journalist Dave Barham

A return to the same guidelines that we came out of the first lockdown with would mean so much to sea anglers. There are hundreds of thousands of us who have not been fishing during the current lockdown due to travel restrictions, either from the shore or boat. It would also mean a lot for charter skippers to be allowed to operate with five paying anglers on board again.

Flyfishing Expert Charles Jardine

Since the first lockdown and resumption of angling, the sport has proven to be a natural source of pleasure and well-being for many thousands of people - both in terms of mental and physical health. Also the boost to rural economies should not be overlooked, especially as many have been hit hard by effects of Covid on their various businesses.



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Appendix 1

Link to [Current Covid Guidelines](#)

Link to [Tier 4 Update](#)

Link to [The Government's Winter Covid Plan: What it means for angling](#)

Link to [Full details of the Winter Plan](#)

Link to [Covid restrictions and how they affect angling in Wales](#)

Link to [At-a-glance guide to fishing in the 4 tiers](#) (table illustrated here)

ANGLING TRUST		At-a-glance guide to fishing in the 4 tiers				ANGLING TRUST	
What you can and cannot do	TIER 1 MEDIUM	TIER 2 HIGH	TIER 3 VERY HIGH	TIER 4 STAY AT HOME			
Fishing	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes			
Travel	You may travel to go fishing but avoid long journeys and travel into and out of Tier 3 areas	You may travel to go fishing but avoid long journeys and travel into and out of Tier 3 areas	Government advice means you may travel to go fishing but should avoid travelling out of the Tier 3 area	Government advice means you may travel to go fishing but should avoid travelling out of the Tier 4 area			
Tackle Shops	Tackle shops can open and are no longer restricted to 'click/call and collect'.	Tackle shops can open and are no longer restricted to 'click/call and collect'.	Tackle shops can open and are no longer restricted to 'click/call and collect'.	Tackle shops can only open for 'click/call and collect'			
Clubhouse and Cafes	Clubhouses, on-site cafes serving food and drink can reopen providing table service is offered	Clubhouses, on-site cafes serving food and drink can reopen providing table service is offered	Clubhouses, on-site cafes can reopen for takeaway services only	Clubhouses, on-site cafes can open for takeaway services only			
Match Fishing	Match fishing can resume with risk assessments in place. Competitions where anglers enter or leave Tier 3 areas should be revised	Match fishing can resume with risk assessments in place. Competitions where anglers enter or leave Tier 3 areas should be revised	Match fishing can resume with risk assessments in place. Government advisory travel guidance recommends competitions with participants from a single Tier 3 only	Because of the Government's rules on public gatherings, competitions are not permitted in Tier 4 areas			
Fisheries, Businesses	Angling businesses, including overnight accommodation, can operate as normal	Angling businesses, including overnight accommodation, can operate as normal	Angling businesses can operate as normal but no accommodation	Angling businesses can operate as normal but no accommodation			
Night Fishing	No time limit on outdoor recreation so night fishing is permitted	No time limit on outdoor recreation so night fishing is permitted	No time limit on outdoor recreation so night fishing is permitted	No time limit on outdoor recreation so night fishing is permitted			
Coaches, Gillies	Coaching to resume at our recommended ratio of 1:4	Coaching to resume at our recommended ratio of 1:4	Coaching to resume at our recommended ratio of 1:4	Coaching only permitted at a ratio of 1:1			
Charter Boats	Charter boats can resume with skipper and up to 5 clients (more on larger boats if Covid secure)	Charter boats can resume with skipper and up to 5 clients (more on larger boats if Covid secure)	Charter boats can resume with skipper and up to 5 clients (more on larger boats if Covid secure)	Charter boats can only operate with skipper and one other client			
Fisheries Management	Working parties for fishery maintenance remain permissible and small-scale fishing club meetings can now resume	Working parties for fishery maintenance remain permissible and small-scale fishing club meetings can now resume	Working parties for fishery maintenance remain permissible	Working parties for fishery maintenance remain permissible			
Tackle Shows & Game Fairs	First steps towards restarting major events. Limited to 50% capacity or 4,000 persons outdoors and 1,000 indoors	First steps towards restarting major events. Limited to 50% capacity or 2,000 persons outdoors and 1,000 indoors	Events should not take place. Only drive-in events permitted	Events should not take place. Only drive-in events permitted			

Fish safely ... please maintain social distancing at all times
See our full guidance at <https://anglingtrust.net/covid-19/>