



Virtual Fisheries Forum 27/07/21 – North Yorkshire Environment Agency Updates

Q&A Session with Pat O'Brien

Q. You touched on the difficulties of short staffing at the EA for the Yorkshire area when it comes to fisheries. What are the chances of/will there be new opportunities for getting into fisheries work with the EA in the foreseeable future for those who are keen to get involved?

A. Hopefully yes as the cuts which have been going on to staffing and projects over the last 10 years are not sustainable as obviously less bodies on the ground greatly limits what we can do. Whilst not specifically fisheries we are in the process of hiring 50 new officers for regulating agricultural pollution which is a considerable issue in/around Yorkshire impacting waterways. Yorkshire will be getting 4 new officers from the 50 hired and the contract will last for 18 months initially subject to review of funding. The bottom line is however that fisheries will still be down in staff and it's largely up to the general public and key stakeholders to apply pressure highlighting that more needs to be done concerning fisheries and more staff needed to do it before the situation will improve. An additional issue is that we often struggle to find people with the right skills to do a lot of the work tasks required in fisheries. Best place to keep an eye out is the EA jobs boards and whilst I am not aware of any posts for fisheries in the immediate future that all could change with reference to what I mentioned before.

Q. Who monitors the water abstraction and what happens if a farmer exceeds their quota? Also, the farmer may be abstracting within their limits but what happens when there is multiple farmers legally abstracting at different points throughout the same River catchment on any given day as the combined impact could be huge?

A. Abstraction for irrigation is all done under licence and farmers will have a maximum overall volume of water they can extract and a specified timeframe in which they are permitted to extract this water. If they are exceeding that then we do have officers to go and check up but sadly a lack of people on the ground makes this challenging to keep on top of without help so it's very useful to us for members of the public like anglers to report things which arouse suspicion. Importantly, always leave your telephone number instead of it being an anonymous report as we will always ring you back if so to follow up the matter. An incident number will be issued with all details of response stored on record to that number.

Q. For the Barbel which have stocked into the Yorkshire rivers like the Wharfe and Swale are any of these fish dye marked? Is there any way which anglers could know if they have caught a stocked fish from Calverton?

A. Dye marking can be a useful way to distinguish between stocked fish and those already living/breeding in the river however the stocked Barbel are so small when they typically go in it's not especially noticeable and we typically receive very few reports from anglers suggesting they have caught a dye marked fish. The approach the EA adopts now is to perform stocking programmes over 3-4 years as opposed to just a one-off stocking. This way we get multiple year classes established which is more successful for overall survival rates. We rarely do extensive post stocking monitoring because this is an additional cost which requires extra planning/infrastructure to do properly. The best feedback we can get is what anglers tell us from catch reports and general observations.

Q. What do you think the return of Salmon to Yorkshire rivers has mostly been driven by?

A. The main reason has been the improvement in water quality resulting from hard regulation on industry and polluters plus extensive time/money spent improving fish passages. The Dales rivers hadn't suffered the same degree of damage to which some of the more urban industrialised rivers had which is why the industrial rivers received much more attention. The River Tyne is the premier Salmon River but the Don, Ure, Swale and other Yorkshire Ouse tributaries all have increasing Salmon numbers and potentially in 20 years the Ure particularly could be the top Salmon River in the country!

Q. Are fisheries improvement grants open to angling clubs and if so where can further details of these be found?

A. (Alex Clegg) This question was answered in the presentation however to reiterate you can go on the Angling Trust website funding page and there is a portal on there to the appropriate EA pages or you can approach/contact a fisheries officer directly.

(Pat O'Brien) Because of the shortage of rod license funding this year we are not actually issuing out anymore grants even to those who are eligible with the required criteria but that should not stop you applying in preparation for next year as we will keep all these applications for when the next round of funding comes through. Other Technical Specialists and I go through all the applications and select the ones which are most worthy of funding based on our [criteria](#).

Commented [OP1]: Whilst this was correct at the time of the forum, we are about to release £8k (underspend) for some projects. We have 8 previous applications and will prioritise allocation today. I expect only 2 will be successful.

Q. Are the Barbel that were stocked into the Wharfe native to Wharfe and are the stocked fish fertile?

(Alex Clegg) I seem to recall the Calverton fish are all Trent brood stock, is that right?

A. (Pat O'Brien) I'm not entirely sure where the brood stock came from as that is all sorted out by Calverton's fishery teams but what is important to know is that unlike game fish stockings the rules over coarse fish are less strict concerning specific origin requirements of brood stock, but I'd still pass this over to Calverton for exact verification. They are certainly fertile. The only sterile fish stocked are triploid Brown trout which is to protect the wild diploid trout in rivers.

Q. You advised that plans have been drawn up for a fish pass at Topcliffe. We (the residents) were advised that it was no longer a live project and that no such plans were in place. Can you therefore confirm that there are indeed plans for a fish pass at Topcliffe?

A. I'm aware that the residents of the Mill at Topcliffe have asked for this information and it is due to be supplied to you. Previous attempts to get this project moving hit difficulties with land access and funding but now we are in a better position to go forward with it and we want to work with the residents to get this off the ground.

Q. What is your personal view on the potential impact of beaver introduction on rivers of Yorkshire?

A. My concern is around fish potential blockage of fish passages by beavers building dams across rivers but at the moment the beavers are all within fenced enclosures, so none are currently introduced, and we won't know until the introduction scheme progresses. But overall, I am a supporter of beaver introductions, but we need to conduct some serious trials and consultations before any are actually released. I personally need to conduct some more research as I'm also aware there is a lot of misinformation floating about regarding the matter. I still however would say that for at least the next 10 years we will not see any beavers released into the wild. Natural England and DEFRA are the main organisations to follow over the matter.

Q. As we come to a close, do you have any final thoughts for those on the call?

A. Simply continue to talk to us (the EA). I often feel these forums do not hit as wide an audience of anglers as they should do which is a problem because communication is paramount with developing and working to improve fisheries. Overall, there has been a great improvement in fisheries of

Yorkshire since I first started my job in fisheries so there is much to be positive about.

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