

# Assynt Visitor Survey 2010

Interim Report from  
Assynt Angling  
Research



## Background and Survey Method

This paper presents the results from a survey conducted by Substance as part of the Assynt Angling Research project. This research is one part of a national research project called the Social and Community Benefits of Angling, funded by the Big Lottery Fund research programme (see [www.assynt.anglingresearch.org.uk](http://www.assynt.anglingresearch.org.uk)).

The purpose of the survey was to generate evidence about:

- i. The level and nature of angling participation amongst general visitors during the peak tourist season
- ii. The level of interest in angling and related services that could potentially be provided in the area
- iii. The level of interest in other tourism related services to help inform local developments and the Assynt Tourism Group and Tourist Information Centre.

Assynt is a remote rural area, with one main village, Lochinver. Tourists stay in a variety of accommodation – self catering, campsites, bed and breakfast and hotels. The research took place in August 2010 at the following places:

- The Assynt Tourism Information Centre (TIC) in Lochinver
- Achmelvich Campsite
- Clachtoll Campsite

Survey respondents were approached either in the TIC or at their caravans and tents in the campsites. The survey was overwhelmingly conducted as an interviewer-led face-to-face questionnaire at the three venues, although a small number (12) were self-completed in the Tourist Information Centre. Respondents at each venue were as follows:

- TIC 33.3%
- Achmelvich Campsite 31.8%
- Clachtoll Campsite 34.9%

The reason for choosing these survey locations was one of practicality – they were places that concentrations of visitors could be easily found. Although the survey was in part a random sample dependent on who came into the TIC or was present in their accommodation at the campsites, it could not be considered as representative of all visitors present in Assynt during the sampling period.

The survey was deliberately kept brief in order to maximise responses. In total 126 survey responses were received, although some respondents omitted certain questions. Completed forms were then manually entered into an online survey collection form at [www.surveymonkey.com/s/assyntvisitor](http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/assyntvisitor).

The results presented in this paper will help inform further work in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and final year of the Assynt Angling Research project. They will also be provided to various angling and community groups in Assynt.



# Survey Responses

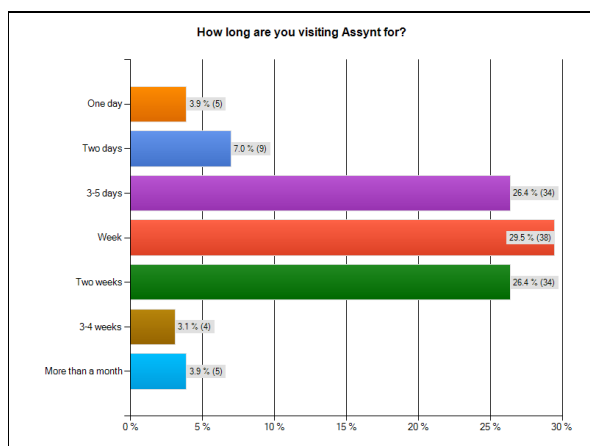
## 1. Visitor Profile

### 1.1 Length of Stay

Just under 56% of respondents stated they were staying for between half a week and a week, with a further 26.4% staying for two weeks. A small proportion were staying one or two days (10.9%), with the remainder staying 3 weeks or longer. A number of these respondents were located at Achmelvic campsite where they have static caravans, including one man who was staying there for over 3 months.

### 1.2 Previous Visits

A majority of respondents (68.3%) had visited before, while 31.7% were making their first visit. This is a smaller majority than in the Assynt Anglers' Survey 2010, where over 90% had visited before (which may itself reflect the experienced/enthusiast nature of many of the angling respondents).



## 1.3 Visitors or Anglers?

Visitors were asked if they had any previous experience of angling in order to link their responses about angling services elsewhere in the survey, with their experience and existing practice.

64.3% (n=83) of respondents said they had never fished before. Although it could be argued that the 35.7% (n=46) who had been fishing is higher than one might expect in the general population, there are a number of explanatory factors:

- Several respondents said that they had fished but not for some time, or 'not since I was a kid' as one put it.
- The location of two thirds of surveys being completed at campsites - which are both by local beaches - may have captured a higher number of people who fish in the sea as part of other holiday activities. Indeed a number commented during the survey interview that they did not consider themselves 'anglers' and some respondents said they only ever fished when they were on holiday.
- Assynt is an area well-known for its fishing (alongside other outdoor activities) and this may have increased proportions.

## 1.4 Fishing in Assynt

Of the 46 respondents who had been fishing before, 68% (n=31) had previously been fishing in Assynt before and 32% had not. This meant that we were able to ask questions about potential service development in Assynt to three distinct groups of visitors - non-anglers, anglers and anglers who had previously fished in Assynt.

## 2. Demand for Angling-Related Services

This section presents findings about the demand for a number of angling-related services in Assynt, and focuses on data from the three groups of survey respondents: those who had never fished before; those who had fished but had not in Assynt; and those who had previously fished in the area. We asked each category of respondent to tick one or more of a number of options about what would encourage them to fish in Assynt (or fish more often if they already did).

The options for angling service development were informed by research elsewhere which states that not knowing where to go, not knowing what to do, not having tackle and equipment and not having someone to go with are the major obstacles to angling participation generally. Respondents were able to choose any number (or none) of the options. These were:

- Better information on angling opportunities
- Knowing where to go
- More opportunities to buy or hire tackle
- Someone to guide me (lochs and rivers)
- Someone to teach me what to do
- Someone to take me on a boat in the sea

### 2.1 Those Who Have Never Fished

Of those who had never fished before, 40.2% (33 respondents), said that they would like to try it when on holiday in the area whilst 59.8% said that they had no interest at all. In terms of what would encourage them to do so, the responses were as follows:

Service	%
Better information on angling opportunities	41.2%
Knowing where to go	41.2%
More opportunities to buy/hire tackle	8.8%
Someone to guide me (lochs, rivers)	14.7%
Someone to coach me what to do	52.9%
Someone to take me on a boat in the sea	79.4%

Although the sample size was relatively small for this subset (n=33), this does show that there is a latent demand for angling, and for services that might encourage or help people who have never tried angling to do so whilst on holiday in Assynt. The appetite for sea angling trips is relatively high, as it is for someone to coach them what to do.

### 2.2 Those Who Haven't Fished in Assynt

50 respondents had been fishing before and of these 32% (n=16) had never been fishing in Assynt. We asked the same question this small section of respondents and their responses are below:

Service	%
Better information on angling opportunities	43.8%
Knowing where to go	37.5%
More opportunities to buy/hire tackle	6.3%
Someone to guide me (lochs, rivers)	31.3%
Someone to coach me what to do	43.8%
Someone to take me on a boat in the sea	68.8%

This reflects a relatively similar response to non-anglers, with sea angling, provision of information and being shown what to do topping the list.

### 2.3 Existing Assynt Anglers

Of the 68% of people (n=31) who were anglers that had previously fished in Assynt, we asked what would encourage them to go fishing more (using the same choices). Highlights included:

- Sea angling trips again received the most support, but with a reduced proportion (57.1% n=20)
- Better information provision was the second most popular response (51.4%) and 'knowing where to go' (45.7%) was third.
- 37.1% of respondents who had previously fished in Assynt said that 'someone to teach me what to do' would encourage them to fish more, with 26.6% wanting guiding services (although once again several respondents specified it would have to be cheaper than current options).

It was noted during interviews with this group of respondents that a high number of those that fished in Assynt did so *only* in the sea – indeed 22 respondents made this comment specifically in the survey. Although small absolute numbers, a significant proportion of these were young people; and several – including parents – said that it was information about and guidance for fly fishing that would encourage them to try it. They already fished and would like to extend their experience to freshwater fishing whilst in Assynt, but didn't know where to start.

This suggests that some basic, entry-level instruction in trout and salmon and sea trout fishing is likely to have a market that is currently untapped with tourists and families. Given that fly fishing anglers also pay permit and boat fees that in turn provide some income for permit sellers, and the remainder of which is reinvested in the area through community based organisations, there is an added benefit to capture this market.

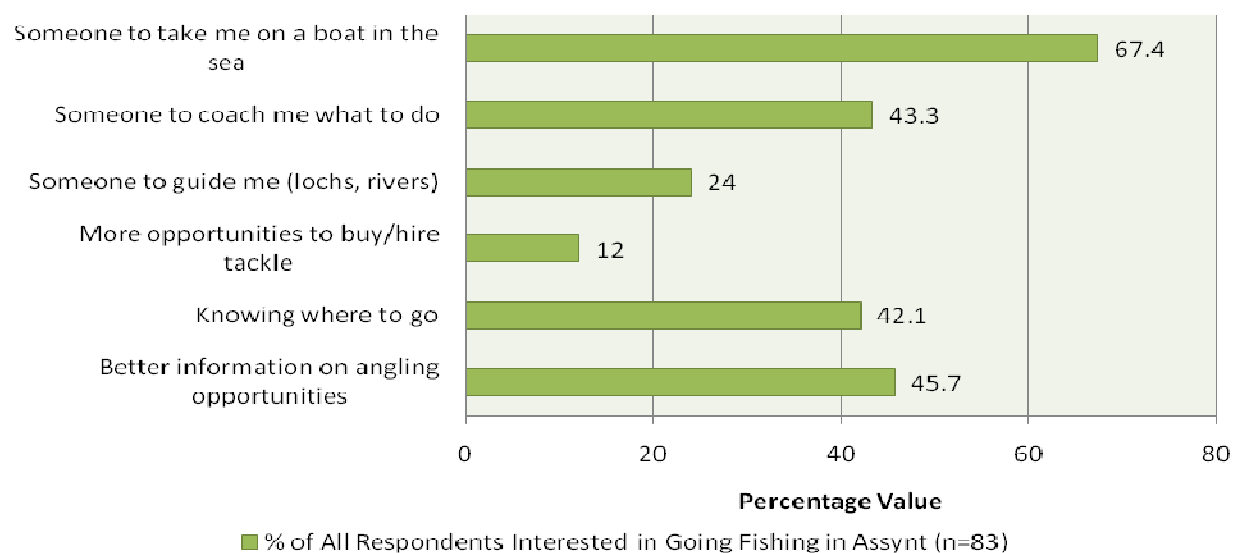
## 2.4 Other comments

Some respondents also made additional comments whilst being interviewed.

- For some, the prospect was clearly one of renewing skills - 'I need a refresher course!'.
- There were cautionary words about the potential cost of coaching or a boat trip: 'it needs to be cheap for the kids'; 'if time is available and it's inexpensive'.
- Two respondents said that they would like to go on sea trips anyway, whether angling or not – 'to see dolphins and seals, but also could try fishing'.
- A number of more elderly respondents suggested during interviews that physical access to angling sites was a key issue: 'I used to fish the Spey. Fitness is an issue now so it would have to be somewhere easy to access.'
- For others the reason they chose not to go fishing was that they were with friends and partners who didn't fish. 'I worked on fishing boats. I would come back for a proper fishing trip – but I'm not there to do that this time.'
- Some said that although they fished, they were daunted by the array of lochs and didn't seem to know where to start as it was very different to their previous angling experience – 'mostly I need to know how to access the lochs and what I need to do.'
- Knowledge of what to do and price are both important issues and comments in this section included: 'would like to try it all but needs to be cheaper'; 'it needs to be affordable unlike what is on offer at the moment'; and 'mostly I need a bit of a steer where to go loch fishing'.
- Respondents also commented that they would like sea boat trips both for fishing *and* just to see sea life: '[I would like] boat trips anyway, to see dolphins and seals, but also could try fishing' reflecting a wider (non-angling) demand we encountered for sea boat trips.

## 2.5 Overall Demand for Angling-Related Services

A total of 83 (64%) out 126 respondents expressed at least *some* interest in fishing, either as non-anglers, those who fished but not in Assynt, or those who already fished in Assynt. In terms of gauging overall demand for angling-related services, we present the findings below.





Despite the fact that we had a relatively high number of visitors who already had an experience of angling, the results do suggest that there is unfulfilled demand for a range of angling related services amongst the general visitor population. In summary:

- There was a lot of enthusiasm for sea angling trips with 67.4% in favour.
- Better information about angling opportunities (45.7%) was second with knowing where to go (42.1%) also popular.
- Having somebody to show visitors what to do was the third most popular option overall with 43.3%
- Guiding to freshwater fishing was less popular at 24.0% - which is perhaps more of a specialist service - and only 12.0% said that more places to buy or hire tackle was important.

We have also presented some more feedback on some of these suggestions in our Assynt Anglers' Survey 2010. To refine knowledge our about this demand further, we could:

- i. Undertake a larger general visitor survey
- ii. Gather data at more venues and at different points in the calendar
- iii. Survey visitors about their 'willingness to pay' (WTP) for various services
- iv. Explore ways in which some service provision could be piloted and 'market tested'
- v. Develop a short leaflet providing more information on all types of angling in Assynt in 2011



### 3. Other Visitor Services

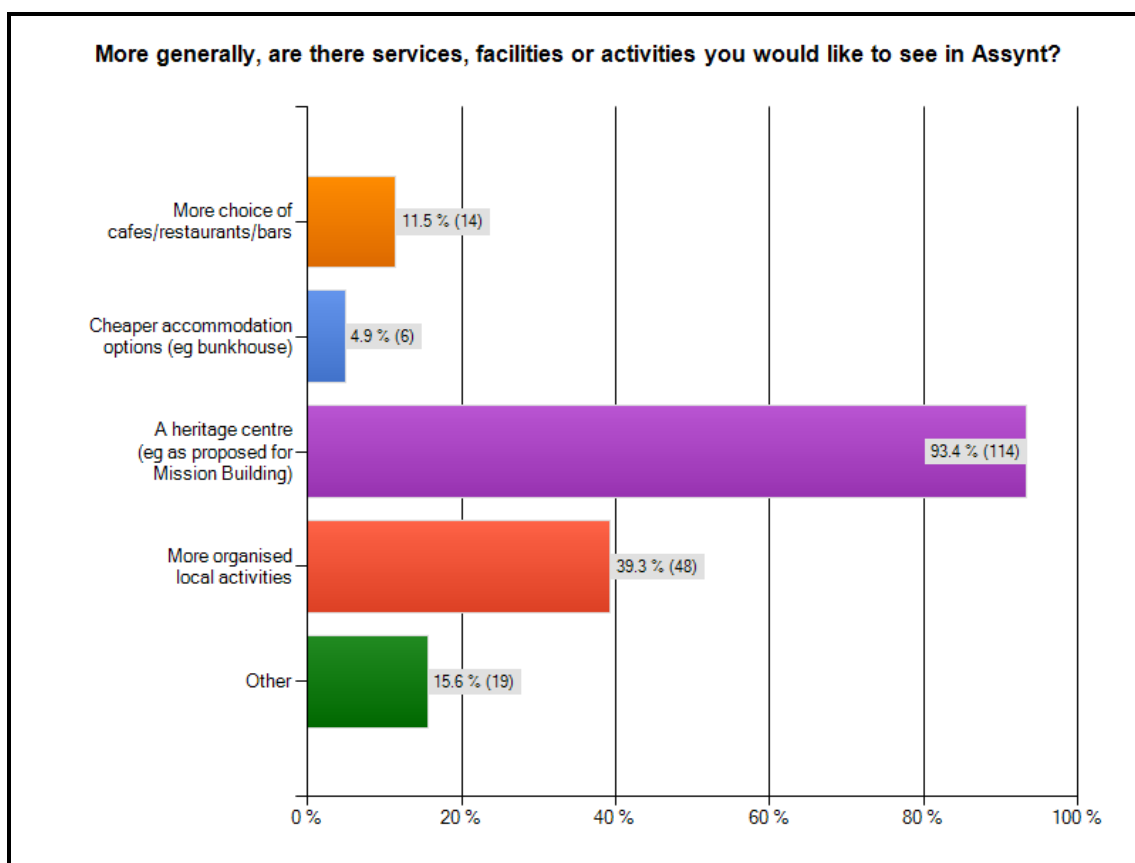
This research was also interested to find out more about demand for other potential areas of tourism-related development and employment. In part this was informed by our Assynt Anglers Survey where we asked similar questions, and in part from interviews and conversations with representatives of local community organisations including Assynt Tourism.

We asked all 126 respondents: 'More generally, are there services, facilities or activities you would like to see in Assynt?'. Included in the list of response options was a specific question about the development of a heritage centre and lobster hatchery in the Lochinver Mission building. This reflected consultation with Assynt Tourism Group and representatives of the Assynt Community Council who were in the process of redeveloping the Mission building in Lochinver. The proposal, which won funding from the Big Lottery Fund's Village SOS scheme in 2010, is to:

- Regenerate the building which is located by the playing field near the harbour in Lochinver
- Create a marine heritage centre to exhibit the history of the local area
- Create a lobster hatchery and 'touch pool'
- Install a new café/food outlet
- Potentially develop other areas such as bunk house accommodation

At the time of writing (December 2010), Assynt Community Council have successfully bought the Mission building, but due to increased build costs are currently seeking additional funding in order to deliver it.

The results of this survey, however, should offer some encouragement for the proposed redevelopment. A very large majority of respondents – 93.4% - said that they would like to see such a facility developed.



This response, which was more than double the next most supported option of more organised local activities (such as those provided by the Ranger service), can be partly explained by the following comments:

- People recognised the heritage centre as an additional indoor option of 'something to do when it's raining' and a number of respondents made this comment (e.g. 'something when raining would be good for kids').
- Many respondents had heard of the development due to national and local media coverage.
- Some respondents lamented the demise of the previous Mission and café and saw the inclusion of a new café as very positive outcome.
- Many respondents said that they wanted to know more about Assynt and thought a representation of marine history in the local area would be of value.
- A number of respondents, notably children, mentioned the proposed lobster touch pool as something that would be of interest.

It is also understandable that people react positively to suggestions of a new attraction. However, the positive reaction should also be interpreted within the context of concerns that visitors have about 'too much' development in Assynt, as discussed in Section 4 of this report. The strength of feeling about overdevelopment serves to really emphasise the level of support respondents gave to the project.

It should also be noted that both the local Ranger Service and the Tourist Information Centre were cited in interviews as very valuable services and popular with visitors. Overall, survey respondents thought local provision of services was good. One new visitor said 'We're pleasantly surprised by how much there is, the Spar [supermarket] is good, and TIC very good'. Several of the 39.3% of respondents who said that they would like more organised activities cited the Ranger Service's existing walks and talks specifically: 'Rangers huts and service are great. TIC excellent but need more for wet weather [options].' A number mentioned the Ranger Service's beach huts in particularly positive terms.

The low response for cheaper accommodation may reflect the relatively high numbers of respondents who were staying at campsites – easily the cheapest form of accommodation in the area – and the fact that if respondents were already visiting Assynt, it is likely that it isn't too expensive for them.

Seven respondents who had no interest in angling – and therefore had not been asked the question about sea fishing boat trips – volunteered that they would like boat trips to be provided so that they could view the coastline and sea life: 'boat trips to see the dolphins and seals' was one suggestion.

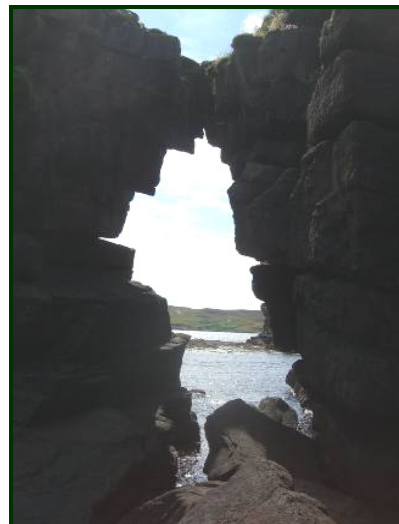
With regard to shops and restaurants, although the vast majority thought that provision was good, there were a number of specific comments made. These included a significant number who wanted to buy local fish - 'there needs to be a fishmonger or somewhere to buy fresh fish. We used to get it from the harbour but can't now'. Another said: 'shops, especially with local produce. We would spend more in the area.' Both suggestions could assist in local employment and income generation.

A range of other suggestions were made:

- 'More leisure centre activities'
- 'More campsites'
- 'Mission café badly missed. But would like place left as it is mostly.'
- 'Mission café and something for son when wet.'
- 'Restaurants are expensive - used to use Mission café. It needs a bakers. Would like talks and music events.'

Some suggestions, however, are probably a little too ambitious:

- 'Better weather!'
- 'Get rid of midges'
- 'Move it a few hundred miles south!'





## 4. Tourism Development

It has been notable in this survey, as well as in other elements of our angling research in Assynt, that visitors tend to be very concerned about the danger of 'over development'. This has been a feature of anglers' comments in interview and in the Assynt Anglers Surveys in 2009 and 2010. In this survey we had a lot of responses that effectively said 'don't change anything' or 'be very careful with any new developments'.

It is worth reprinting a selection of these comments below, as it was such a strong theme:

- 'Don't over develop - good as it is.'
- 'Leave it just as it is, we are walkers and don't need anything else.'
- 'Not much needed everything here.'
- 'Looking for quiet and walking mountains. Don't develop. Rangers huts very good – they are low key.'
- 'Not much. Don't over develop!'
- 'Not much development - whole idea is to get away from it all. Don't need more shops but would like some sign posting and things to do in rain.'
- 'Real concern that it isn't over developed. There's a lot here now, we use all the cafes, but things about right. Need to look after Achmelvich too many cars.'
- 'Don't want more development.'
- 'Achmelvich is already too crowded and over commercialised. Too many motor boats which are a danger to kids.'

This eagerness to keep things as they are was true even of those who did want *some* new services: 'Perfect as it is. Could do with campsite shop [at Clachtoll] though.'

As reported in the Assynt Angling Research Interim Report in 2009, there is a clear need for a careful balance to be struck here. On one hand, if local people and agencies want to create greater local economic and social benefit for the area

from tourism – i.e. to tackle the significant issues of local employment, housing and youth-retention – then some new services or businesses need to be developed. Some of these could be provided to meet existing demand as evidenced in our 2010 surveys and do not *necessarily* mean increasing visitor numbers. These could play a role in retaining more spending in the local economy from existing visitors.

However, increasing visitor numbers, especially at times of lower demand in April/May and September ('the shoulders of the season'), and in season's when demand is lower; encouraging return visits; and encouraging longer visits would all support tourism-related employment.

On the other hand, it is clear that if this is done excessively, insensitively, or in a way that threatens the unique selling points for tourism in Assynt – its remoteness, its apparently undeveloped nature, its 'peace and quiet' – then that may ultimately harm visitor numbers, the quality of visitor experience, spending and the very objectives of social and economic community benefit that tourism development seeks to achieve.



## 5. Conclusions

This is an Interim Report based on a limited study. Furthermore, the focus of this research is specifically on how *angling* can be of greater social benefit to the local area. Further work and research is needed on the potential of both angling-related services and more general tourism-related services, which will be conducted in the final year of the project and in conjunction and following consultation with local agencies and local people in Assynt in early 2011.

These brief 'conclusions' are provided in that context.

### 5.1 Non-Angling Tourism Services

In terms of non-angling services, it was notable from the survey results that there was considerable support for some tourist-related services development. However, this was overwhelmingly focused on two areas – in particular the Mission Building redevelopment, but also to a lesser extent the provision of more organised activities such as the Ranger walks and other talks.

The Mission project is well underway but is seeking additional funding. Those responsible have also undertaken some of their own research about what both visitors and local people want to see developed as it will be a year-round facility. A positive aspect of the project is that even those who were surveyed for this research and concerned about overdevelopment remained positive about this regenerated facility. The fact that it is not a new building, but a new use for an existing building, is probably important in this respect.

Substance will provide the outcomes of this survey to the Assynt Community Council and is due to present to the Assynt Tourism Group AGM in March 2011. We will discuss what, if any, further assistance can be given.

The Ranger Service is also exploring some new developments, notably an 'Eagle Project' with the Culag Community Woodland Trust and Assynt Foundation, which will install web cams near an eagle's nest and provide viewing access at the Tourist Information Centre. We are also exploring with the Ranger Service and others including the CCWT some associated work around fish and biodiversity.

### 5.2 Angling-Related Services

Although further detail is provided in our Assynt Angling Survey 2010 report, there is clearly demand from both anglers and non-angling visitors to Assynt for particular angling-related services.

From the survey responses it appears that those that already go fishing in Assynt have an interest in doing more angling. This is particularly so with regard to those that currently go sea fishing but not trout fishing, where a lack of knowledge of where to go and what to do are barriers. It was also notable from several parents' comments that they would like their children to be able to try trout angling – whether by fly or other means. It is also clear that there is some interest amongst non-anglers that they would like to 'give fishing a try' when on holiday in Assynt.

This suggests the potential for:

- i. Development of organised sea angling trips from boats where there was very high demand
- ii. Further development of information provision and awareness and greater 'visibility' of angling opportunities to the more casual visitor.
- iii. Provision of entry-level tuition in how to fish – both for trout and/or fly fishing and sea angling – at low cost.

There is perhaps less demand for more formal guiding – something that might appeal more to the more experienced anglers and which to some extent is already catered for.

All of these services could be provided as options which are low impact in terms of the wider natural and built environment something that remains important in light of the discussion in the previous section around 'over-development'.

However, further research, business development and support work is essential in 2011 to refine these findings and explore possibilities further. This needs to include research on:

- Visitor 'willingness to pay'
- Feasibility for what could be episodic and will certainly be seasonal work
- Practicalities of provision, bookings and availability for local people who are almost certainly undertaking other employment and

- Availability of employment and business start-up support and grants.

### 5.3 Other Research Outputs

The Social and Community Benefits of Angling project continues until the end of 2011 when it will issue a Final Report.

In the meantime a range of documents and other material from the project as a whole – which also includes studies on angling participation and angling and young people – are now available.

These are:

- The Angling Research Resources website ([www.resources.anglingresearch.org.uk](http://www.resources.anglingresearch.org.uk)) – a 'one stop shop' for all this project's outputs as well as other angling research material.
- A suite of four Theme Papers on potential benefits from angling participation (physical activity, health and well being, socialisation, environmental improvement).
- A series of three reports on angling and young people (on well being benefits, barriers to participation and on the added value of angling interventions (such as Get Hooked on Fishing) for disadvantaged young people)
- The Assynt Anglers Survey 2010 outcomes and this report, the Assynt Visitor Survey 2010.



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