

Assynt Anglers Survey 2010

An Interim Report
from Assynt
Angling Research



Introduction

This paper presents the results from an angler survey conducted by Substance as part of the [Assynt Angling Research](#) project. The project is one part of a national research project called the [Social and Community Benefits of Angling](#), funded by the Big Lottery Fund research program.

The survey is the second that this project has conducted on visiting anglers in Assynt. Results from the first survey in 2009 can be found in [Angling and Rural Areas: The Assynt Angling Study Interim Report 2009](#)¹.

The methodology for the conducting the survey has followed that of the previous year, namely:

- An open, online questionnaire hosted via the Assynt Angling Research website
- Paper copies of the questionnaire left for self-complete at the Tourist Information Centre (TIC) in Lochinver.
- A dedicated personal computer (PC) in the TIC through which the site and questionnaire could be accessed.

In total of 116 responses were received, which, although a significant increase on 2009 (49), was slightly under the target of 150-200 we identified. It should be pointed out that, due to some technical issues with the PC in the TIC, the online version of the questionnaire was not accessible in Lochinver itself until late June 2010. Furthermore, some technical issues with the online survey meant that a higher proportion of respondents did not complete all of the survey (with only 51% completing all aspects).

In an attempt to mitigate these problems, we distributed contact postcards to all local angling permit outlets. Anglers purchasing a permit were asked to complete a postcard so that they could be contacted by the research team at a later date. This initiative provided further postcode data and email addresses that can be followed up for telephone interviews.

Progress of the Research

This research project will conclude in December 2011.

- Following consultation with a number of community, tourism and angling organisations in Assynt, we will produce a paper in early 2011 outlining some development options for increasing community and social benefit from angling in the area.
- This paper will form the basis of discussions with those same organisations in February and March 2011, and these discussions will inform ongoing work, including assistance in development of additional funding bids where appropriate.
- We will issue a Final Report for the Assynt work as well as the overall project in December 2011.

1. Who Fishes in Assynt?

This section discusses results from the first part of the survey, which deals with the demographic profile of anglers visiting Assynt.

1.1 Age of Anglers

As with our findings in 2009, the average age of Assynt anglers is relatively high, at 53. The age range with the highest number of anglers is 50-54 (20%), with second highest ranges at 45-49 and 55-59 (both 14%).

Age of Anglers	% (n=)
20-24	3% (1)
25-29	4% (2)
30-34	7% (4)
35-39	7% (4)
40-44	12% (7)
45-49	14% (8)
50-54	20% (12)
55-59	14% (8)
60-64	8% (5)
65-69	8% (5)
70-74	5% (3)
TOTAL	100% (59)

The relatively old profile of visiting Assynt anglers and local anecdotal accounts of falling numbers of younger anglers, suggests that some work could be done to increase participation of younger anglers in the area. Indeed, there is concern more generally in angling in the UK about the ageing profile of anglers, and much angling development activity in both Scotland and the rest of the UK is focused on encouraging young anglers.

In our Assynt Visitor Survey 2010, we interviewed a number of younger anglers who went sea fishing but didn't know where to start with freshwater fishing, despite an enthusiasm to do so. Given that some of these youths are potential visiting game anglers of the future, investigating how they could be encouraged to learn about fishing in freshwater could help sustain tourism and angling businesses in Assynt.

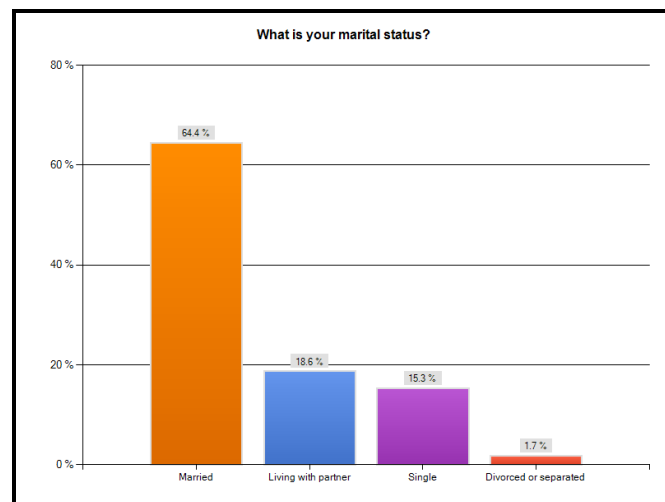
1.2 Gender

As with the results of angling studies conducted elsewhere, angling in Assynt is heavily dominated by males. In 2010, 99% of respondents were male, which is even higher than the 2009 data, where 95% of the sample were male. Exploring

the demand of female visitors to Assynt to go angling, and ways in which this could be encouraged, could help increase angler numbers without increasing total numbers of visitors.

1.3 Marital Status

In terms of marital status, 64.4% were married, 18.6% living with a partner and 17% were single or divorced/separated.



1.4 Ethnicity

Responses to a question about ethnicity showed that surveyed anglers saw themselves as belonging to either the White, White Scottish or White British ethnic groups. This result was almost identical to findings from the 2009 survey.

1.5 Education

Results on the educational attainment of visiting anglers were broadly similar to 2009 data, with 2010 responses containing slightly more postgraduates (36.8%, n=21) and slightly less undergraduates (26.3%, n=15) plus a higher number of respondents with no educational qualifications than in 2009 (3.5%).

1.6 Country of Origin

In terms of where visiting anglers came from, again this year's results were quite similar to 2009 – i.e. predominantly UK based; a majority of whom were from Scotland (50.8% as opposed to 42.4% from England and 3.4% from Wales). There was also a small number of international visiting anglers (1.7% for both Germany and Holland).

1.7 Postcode Survey

To provide further detail of where the UK based-anglers came from postcodes were once again collected from visiting anglers. The 2010 data shows a similar pattern to 2009, with concentrations of visitors coming from the Scottish Central Belt, and the Northern and South Eastern areas of England.



1.8 Visits to Assynt

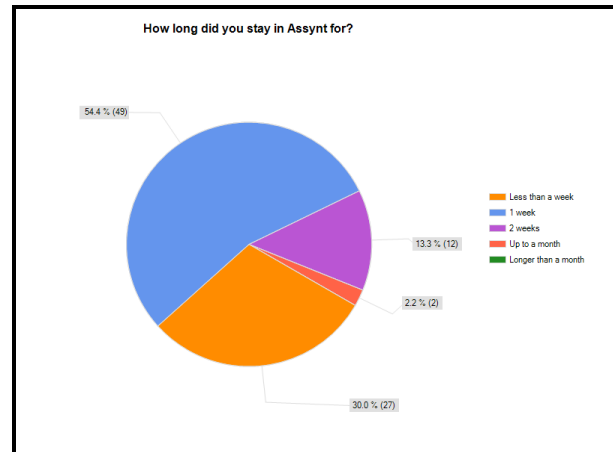
We also surveyed anglers about the nature of their visits to Assynt.

1.8.1 Last Visit

The majority - 43% (n=50) - of respondents had visited Assynt in the previous month.

1.8.2 Length of Stay

A majority of respondents (54.4%) stayed for one week, with 30% staying for less than a week and 13.3% staying for two weeks. One option for increasing income from angling into the local area would be to encourage those staying a week or less to stay longer.



1.8.3 Where Anglers Stayed

A majority of respondents (55.3%) stayed in self catering accommodation, with 11.8% 'other' (including 5% who stayed with family or friends), 11.8% in a hotel and 10.5% in Bed and Breakfast accommodation. In order to increase the impact of existing visitors in terms of local spending and to encourage longer or repeat stays, one option to be considered would be to develop accommodation and angling 'packages' as other rural angling locations do.

Summary

From our surveys in 2009 and 2010 anglers who visit Assynt tend to be older than average, experienced, male, from the UK with a large number from Scotland, who mostly stay for a week, a majority of whom in self catering accommodation. In terms of promoting angling in Assynt, there are two non-exclusive potential responses to this:

- Develop marketing, packages and publicity that targets that market
- Create ways to encourage anglers from other sections of society, including from within existing general visitor profiles.

3. Economic Impact

We wanted to gauge the amount of economic benefit Assynt receives as a result of visiting anglers. We asked visiting anglers to estimate how much they spent in an average stay, according to a number of expenditure categories.

3.1 Raw Averages

From 76 responses in 2010, the raw expenditure averages are provided in the table below.

Expenditure Category	Average Spend Per Angler (£)
Accommodation	329.80
Fishing permits	42.94
Boats	20.70
Fishing tackle	16.04
Guiding/coaching	0.11
Food shopping	101.39
Eating/drinking out	136.23
Other	50.94
Total	698.15

3.2 Total Numbers of Anglers

Part of the challenge in estimating the economic impact associated with angling is establishing the absolute numbers of anglers who visit in one year. There are a number of factors that mean that this is difficult, namely:

- Neither the Assynt Angling Association nor the Assynt Crofters' Trust require anglers to leave their personal details when buying permits, so identifying the numbers of unique individuals is difficult from permit data.
- Although we are in the process undertaking work to map permit sales more accurately on a day by day basis, at present there are no accurate figures on the total numbers of permits sold per provider.
- Anglers may fish more than one day with one provider and still be regarded as two separate permit sales, or fish with both AAA and ACT on different days/weeks.
- There will be a proportion of anglers who fish without permits.
- Those who only go sea fishing in Assynt don't buy permits.
- The numbers of visitors and the number of anglers will vary from year to year (for instance trout permit sales were up by an estimated 12% in 2010 compared to 2009).

However, following local consultation with those administering permits it is estimated that somewhere in the region of 1,000 individual trout fishing permits – which include day, weekly and season permits – are sold per provider annually. It is also estimated that over 150 salmon anglers fish on the River Inver and River Kirkaig are sold each year. In the Assynt Visitor Survey, it was also identified that a relatively high proportion of visitors only fish in the sea, and these people would not be recorded on permit sales.

Taking all this information into account, we have estimated that 1500 individual anglers visit the area per year. Some people locally have said that they think this figure is too low, and others have argued that it may be too high. Without more accurate permit sale data, we cannot be sure, but nevertheless the figure of 1500 anglers will be used as a basis for calculation.

3.3 Combined Averages 2009-2010

We requested very similar information on expenditure from anglers in both the 2009 and 2010 seasons (with 49 and 76 responses respectively). We have taken an average across the two surveys (a total of 125 individual responses) to calculate average expenditure per angler. The table below shows:

- The average spend per category per angler in 2009 and 2010
- The mean average spend per angler.

Expenditure Category	2010 Average Per Angler (£)	2009 Average Per Angler (£)	Combined Average Per Angler (£)
Accommodation	329.80	£314.98	322.39
Fishing permits	16.04	£8.50	12.27
Boats	0.11	£0	0.11
Fishing tackle	101.39	£87.22	94.3
Guiding/coaching	136.23	103.14	119.67
Food shopping	42.94	£37.82	40.38
Eating/drinking out	20.70	£0	20.70
Other	50.94	£31.22	41.08
Total	698.15	582.88	650.9

3.4 Aggregate Total Spend

Given an estimated 1500 anglers per annum:
The aggregate total spend (i.e. the sum of each expenditure category) based on 1500 visiting anglers per year is £976,350.

3.5 Calculating Output

Understanding the effect of the direct spending by anglers requires some further work. SQW Ltd's (2006) study of the economic impact of angling on the River Tweedⁱⁱ reviewed a number of other studies in order to understand the effect of different forms of spending in different categories and the 'multiplier effects' of spending.

The final report by SQW made a number of points that are relevant to the research in Assynt:

- i. We need to make an allowance for displacement – i.e. anglers who would have visited Assynt anyway, even if they were not fishing. In our survey, roughly 95% of those responding said that the principal motivation was for fishing. Given that non-respondents may have been less committed anglers, and a number of those in our visitor survey said they went sea fishing as part of their holiday rather than the main reason for it, we have estimated a displacement of 10% - reducing figures accordingly.
- ii. The SQW study made an adjustment for the impact of local anglers. However our survey was of visiting anglers so we have not factored this in.
- iii. The SQW study included travel in the area of part of its calculations. Whilst this can be considerable in Assynt, we have not included this and as such our figures should be regarded cautious.
- iv. The SQW study also used multipliers for expenditure in different categories. This is because when £1 is spent in an area on a particular item, a proportion of that money is re-spent in the local economy. SQW used some accepted multipliers to calculate the output that direct spending indicated. These were:
 - Accommodation x 1.25
 - Food beverage x 1.47

- Tackle, guides etc x 1.40
- Food shopping x 1.21
- Other spending x 1.24

Finally, the Tweed study said that a considerable proportion of angling is owned externally to the local region, and accordingly they deducted 14% for 'leakage' of expenditure on fishing permits, boats and ghillies. This isn't true of most angling opportunities in Assynt, as the rights for most trout angling are owned by local community-based organisations. As such we have deducted only 5% from the figures of expenditure on fishing permits, boats and ghillies.

Based on these assumptions (detailed calculations appear in the table below): **the Aggregate Output based on 1500 anglers is estimated at £1,108,500 per annum.**

3.6 Calculating Gross Value Added

Most economic impact studies also calculate the 'Gross Value Added' of expenditure in a region. This means the 'operating profit' that expenditure in a region can equate to. To better illustrate this concept, expenditure on food in a local shop can be calculated as a total amount, but some (possibly a majority) of that expenditure will be paying for the cost of supplying the food bought. As the SQW study says, 'it can also be defined as turnover minus cost of bought in goods and services'ⁱⁱⁱ.

Although we cannot do this with total accuracy without an additional survey of the Assynt businesses that anglers spend their money with, based on other studies SQW use a GVA rate of 39%.

If we apply this to our figures:

The Total GVA based on a ratio of 39% is therefore - £432,315.

Category	Average Spend per Angler (£)	Leakage from angling rents (5%)	-10% adjustment (displacement)	Multiplier	Output (to nearest whole)
Accommodation	322.39		290.39	1.25	363
Fishing permits	12.27		11.07	1.4	15
Boats	94.3		84.9	1.47	125
Fishing tackle	119.67		107.77	1.21	130
Guiding/coaching	40.38	38.36	34.56		35
Food shopping	20.70	20.08	18.08	1.4	25
Eating/drinking out	0.11	0.1	0.09	1.4	0
Other	41.08		36.98	1.24	46
Total	650.9				739

3.7 Calculating Employment Impact

To calculate the impact of economic output from angling visitors in Assynt, it is again necessary to apply a ratio of the cost of employment to the total output figure. SQW used a figure of £32,750 of output *per job* based on previous studies and the known seasonal, often part-time nature of angling-related expenditure and cumulative inflation. Given the SQW study was conducted in 2006, we have taken a rate of £36,000 per Full Time Equivalent (FTE) job.

On this basis:

The Total Employment Impact of the Aggregate Output of Visiting Assynt Anglers is £1,108,500 / £36,000 = 31 FTEs

To put this in context, the population of the Assynt Community Council area in 2001 was 953. In terms of unemployment, a report by Kirsty McLeod of Assynt Office Services in 2007 said:

At the time of the 2001 census, 6.6% of the population were unemployed in April, although this fell to 4.6% in May and 4% in June 2001 [as the busier summer months approach]. Not surprisingly, given the number of seasonal jobs in the area, lower rates occur in the period between April and October. In the year from April 2002 to March 2003, the rate of unemployment ranged from 1.9% to 5.4%.^{iv}

The average unemployment rate in the region has been quoted as 3.8%^v, so the report illustrates the importance of seasonally based activities supporting employment in the area. The following Ward statistics^{vi} illustrate the percentages of the population employed in different sectors.

	Ward
Percentage of people employed in:	
Agriculture & fishing	10.5
Energy & water	0.9
Manufacturing	3.4
Construction	4.4
Distribution, hotels and restaurants	30.2
Transport and communications	5.1
Banking, finance & insurance, etc.	6.2
Public admin., education & health	32.4
Other services	6.8

It is fair to say that most of the impact of angler spending will be on tourism-related business, and would be seasonally spent. Furthermore, to ensure more accurate estimates a more extensive economic impact study would need to be

undertaken, including surveys of spending by businesses - especially accommodation providers - plus a bigger sample of anglers. However, if the estimates in this paper are used as a basis, angling makes a considerable contribution to a fragile rural economy.

Summary

Some economic impact studies, especially those seeking to boost a particular area, project or activity, can lean toward optimistic estimates. We have tried to be conservative with our estimates, and acknowledge that further work is needed to improve accuracy of these figures. However, our survey shows a significant economic and employment benefit to a small, remote rural area from angling visitors.

- **Total Output** based on 1500 anglers = **£1,108,500**
- The **Gross Value Added** = **£432,315**
- The **Employment Impact** = **31 FTEs**

Even if we were to be more cautious, by reducing figures by 20%, this would still equate to £886,800 output and 25 FTEs.

The corollary to this is that if the amount of time anglers spend in Assynt is increased, or if total numbers of anglers visiting are increased, then additional local economic benefit and employment benefit can be generated.

4. Anglers' Experiences

4.1 Motivations

The angler survey asked respondents to rank, from 1-4, the most important things to them about angling in Assynt. The responses appear in the chart on this page.

Quality of fish stocks and fishing remote hill lochs scored highest in first preferences (note that in the chart a first preference is represented as 1 and shaded as orange). The feeling of remoteness, being able to fish without seeing others, the challenging nature of fishing in Assynt and the scenery in which people fish also scored highly overall (i.e. once all the preferences are totaled). This includes a lot of people who placed scenery and remoteness issues as second and third preferences.

These findings support some of the more qualitative research we have conducted, which suggests that what attracts anglers isn't just angling, but the environmental and social context in which angling takes place. It also links to some of the comments presented below that focus on 'development' and the fear that further development could alter the context of angling in Assynt. As such, in order to retain what attracts people to Assynt, whilst also creating greater local

benefit, there is a clear need for sensitive approach in dealing with this issue.

4.2 Who Anglers Fished With

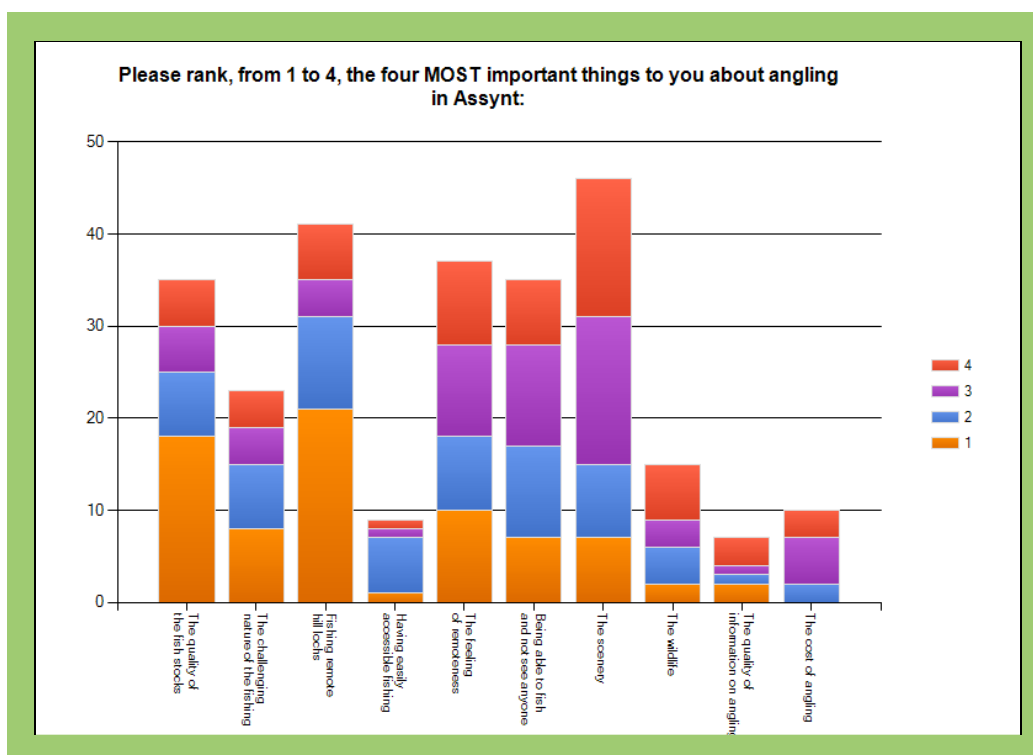
When in Assynt, anglers mostly fished with friends (39.7%) or family (28.6%), while a considerable number fish on their own (30.2%).

4.3 Physical Activity

Anglers were asked to rate the amount of physical activity they undertook when fishing, partly to provide comparative data to our wider angling research. It was found that:

- Fewer anglers rated their experience as involving 'high intensity' activity in 2010 (46%, n=28) than in 2009 (66%) but that this was still well above national averages.
- There were a higher number of those saying it involved 'moderate' intensity (44.4%).
- There were very low numbers reporting low levels of activity (9.5%)

This of course reflects the nature of angling in Assynt – the landscape in the area is rugged, and access to lochs, rivers or streams typically entails walking uphill or over uneven ground. Getting to good sea fishing marks can also involve considerable effort on the part of the angler. However, the 'physicality' of angling in Assynt is also a good 'selling point' for attracting people to the area, especially to those keen on outdoor physical pursuits and those seeking personal health benefits whilst they are visiting.



How Would You Improve Angling Provision in Assynt?	Unimportant	Neither Unimportant nor Important	Important	Very Important	Unsure
Improving the quality of information on local angling	24.1% (14)	13.8% (8)	43.1% (25)	19.0% (11)	0.0% (0)
Improving fish stocks	14.5% (8)	25.5% (14)	41.8% (23)	18.2% (10)	0.0% (0)
More people to fishing, to generate investment in local angling	34.0% (18)	34.0% (18)	20.8% (11)	3.8% (2)	7.5% (4)
No more people fishing	20.0% (10)	38.0% (19)	24.0% (12)	14.0% (7)	4.0% (2)
'Beginner' services - e.g. tuition	57.4% (31)	22.2% (12)	18.5% (10)	0.0% (0)	1.9% (1)
'Expert' advice - e.g. affordable guides	37.7% (20)	32.1% (17)	24.5% (13)	5.7% (3)	0.0% (0)
Sea angling charter boats	35.8% (19)	18.9% (10)	37.7% (20)	5.7% (3)	1.9% (1)
Reducing the cost	40.4% (23)	40.4% (23)	10.5% (6)	8.8% (5)	0.0% (0)
Increasing the cost	31.5% (17)	46.3% (25)	11.1% (6)	7.4% (4)	3.7% (2)
Permits to cover all areas	12.5% (7)	19.6% (11)	33.9% (19)	32.1% (18)	1.8% (1)
Establishing a 'fishing hotel'	34.0% (18)	35.8% (19)	22.6% (12)	5.7% (3)	1.9% (1)
Boats available on more lochs	21.4% (12)	25.0% (14)	32.1% (18)	19.6% (11)	1.8% (1)

4.6 Comments on Developing Angling

We also asked anglers to provide general comments they might have about angling development in Assynt and the potential development of new services or improvements. A selection of these are provided below, which we have categorised according to theme.

As with 2009 and our interviews with anglers, the comments made by anglers display a prevailing sense of satisfaction with things 'the way they are' and amongst most anglers a recognition of the need for some sort of balance between providing services, local benefit and maintaining the unique selling points of angling in Assynt.

'Satisfied'	Very happy with current situation
	At the moment all things ok regarding brown trout fishing
	For myself, I am quite happy wandering about fishing hill lochs, As I did not catch anything this time, I can't really comment on the fish stock.
	No changes are really needed. I enjoy the fishing for brown trout in remote areas for its simplicity and lack of regulation and organisation. I appreciate boats when they are present and make use of them but am not worried if there is no increase. I would not want to see an increase in anglers because I really appreciate being on a loch and not seeing anybody else.
A Balanced Approach	Bit of a Catch 22, the more people that fish means more income, which is great for new boats, engines stocking etc, but the best bit about fishing in Assynt is the fact that there is hardly anyone there
	A balance needs to be found that ensures the local community can develop the fishing potential with the need to preserve the environment.
	I realise that money spent in the area is good for everyone but not at the expense of losing the solitary experience.

Among some angler comments there is a strong resistance to the idea of more people fishing in Assynt or to any new 'development' – be it tourist related or in terms of developing angling services.

"I don't want more people; the cost of the permits is fine; leave the fish stocks in peace; ban any introduction of rainbows."

"There is a plethora of information available. The fishing stock is natural and therefore cannot be improved. More/less people fishing? A balance needs struck. We all know that. Expert advice? Not needed. Assynt angling? Beginners need not apply. Expert advice? Always welcome... Permits for all areas? Is anyone so stupid they could not work it out?"

"Encouraging more people to fish will result in increased pressure on a fragile environment (e.g. Paths) and so detract from the unique qualities of the hill lochs."

On the other hand, other anglers made a range of suggestions regarding improvements to the angling offer and new angling services. The permit system for trout fishing, including the zoned approach of the Assynt Angling Association as well as the Assynt Crofters' Trust provision in North Assynt, causes some confusion for some anglers. This is a problem that more/better information could address (and something this research project has sought to alleviate through the Assynt Angling Information and Research website). In other areas of the UK – such as the south west of England – an angling passport approach has been successfully implemented, albeit with a much greater number of permit suppliers/riparian owners and with a different historical context to Assynt.

Permit Comments	<i>A single permit giving access to ALL lochs would be a great benefit.</i>
	<i>Having to buy different permits is a hassle. However, I wouldn't want to pay extra for a larger permit, when one area contains so many lochs.</i>
	<i>Many people seem to fish the hill lochs without permits. We have been visiting this area regularly for the last ten years, and no one I have ever met whilst fishing has had a permit, except myself.</i>

Provision of angling information was an aspect highlighted by some respondents:

"...having some sort of booklet on where to park and where the tracks start on the Assynt Crofters Trust Lochs. A wooden sign post at the start of the track signifying which Loch you are fishing is essential and which they now do in Caithness. It can save an hour of guessing !!!!"

"I realise there's a lot of knowledge built up over the years that newcomers wouldn't have."

"As an elderly annual fishing holiday visitor, wanting to fish new lochs each year - finding where permits and boats are available and then getting them can be problematical. As a result we tend to fish the same lochs each year."

There were a number of other suggestions made, outlined below. We will explore these with angling providers in the coming year.

Boats	<i>Better boats, as the plastic ones are dreadful</i>
	<i>Keys for boats more widely available. Time consuming, costly and not environmentally friendly to drive a long way past where you are fishing to get key in Lochinver. Crofters boats keys even more inaccessible.</i>
Fish Stocks	<i>Improving fish stocks would be great, but only through habitat improvement - not through artificial stocking.</i>
Sea Fishing	<i>I have only once been sea fishing out of Kylesku on a charter boat which could have been improved by having sufficient rods to go round. We ended up rod sharing.</i>
	<i>More online information on sea angling. The fly fishing is well documented but not salt water angling</i>
Hotels	<i>I do not like hotels like Scourie which are full of anglers and are very tourist orientated. Found lack of boats on some lochs a nuisance</i>
	<i>Many fishers at Scourie have moved on because of the recent decline of Inchnadamph hotel. A trout fishing hotel would really help.</i>
Access	<i>A small point but a local taxi would allow me to get to the access points for the lochs without having to take the family car or get my family up at dawn to take me. The other members of my family are non-anglers so need the car to go out if I'm fishing</i>

4.7 Non-Angling Services

Anglers were asked about what other – i.e. non-angling – services or facilities would encourage them to return to Assynt. The responses are provided in the table on this page. In terms of support for particular services:

- More choice of restaurants and cafés was considered an important or very important development by more than 40% of respondents - although this scored very low in our general visitors' survey
- More information on activities was considered important or very important by more than 30% of respondents.
- The Mission building development was not viewed as being particularly important especially compared to the high responses in our visitor survey. One possible reason for this could be the lack of information about it in a self-complete online questionnaire for anglers compared to interview-led approach used with visitors.
- Less development recorded the strongest measure of support, with more than 65% of the sample rating it important or very important. This result reflects some of the comments discussed earlier and the debate highlighted below.

4.8 Other Comments

We also asked anglers to make any other comments about their visit they wished, examples of the comments are outlined below.

Incentives to return:

- *Need no incentives. Been before, shall return.*
- *Assynt is an annual trip for us!*
- *I do not care. I will be back. Soon.*
- *I do not need any encouragement!!!*
- *Prices have made a difference in the last year or two. We will cut back on other things, so that we can still holiday here.*

Fears of over development:

- *Assynt can still be wrecked by inappropriate development*
- *Please keep it underdeveloped*

Angling-related services:

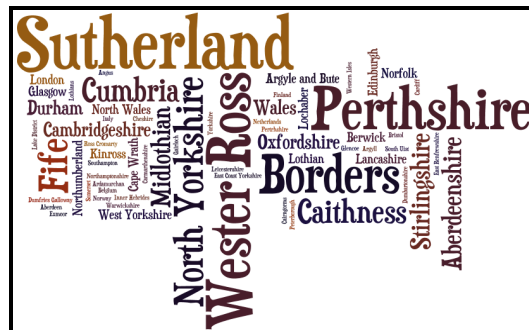
- *Better fishing info for permits and access*
- *Specific info on lochs or the supply of maps of the area*
- *Easier access to permits & boats*
- *Better information on where tracks to Lochs start.*

Requests for new tourism based services:

- *A family orientated pub!*
- *Better grocery shops open later on Thursdays and Fridays*
- *Taxi would be useful to allow non circular walks*

4.9 Other Places Anglers Visit

One new question for 2010 aimed to find out other locations where anglers went fishing. The word cloud below illustrates by county the responses to this question and shows that many of the survey respondents also fish elsewhere in Sutherland and nearby Wester Ross. These results perhaps suggest potential for developing angling tourism based links with nearby areas.



	Very Unimportant	Unimportant	Neither Important nor Unimportant	Important	Very Important
More available accommodation	18.1%	27.8%	16.7% #	25.0%	12.5%
More 'value' /bunkhouse accommodation	33.8%	35.3%	16.2%	8.8%	5.9%
More choice of restaurants/cafes	15.3%	25.0%	15.3%	38.9%	5.6%
A Marine Heritage Visitor centre	25.7%	31.4%	27.1%	15.7%	0.0%
IT services - e.g. email and web access	42.6%	27.9%	17.6%	11.8%	0.0%
More information on activities	22.2%	27.8%	18.1%	29.2%	2.8%
Less development	2.9%	14.7%	16.2%	38.2%	27.9%
Reduced travel costs	5.6%	19.7%	22.5%	35.2%	16.9%

5. Research Impact

5.1 Assynt Angling Information and Research Website

In 2009 we established the Assynt Angling Information and Research project website at www.assynt.anglingresearch.org.uk. The website has received considerable publicity, including a small article in *Trout and Salmon* magazine, and articles in the *Scotsman*, *Northern Times* and several online publications. In terms of usage, in 2010 there were:

- 5,100 absolute unique visitors
- 10,598 visits
- 53,236 page views
- An average of 5 page views per visit
- 46.3% new visits on 2009

These figures are almost five times users in 2009 where there were 1,201 unique visitors and 16,376 page views. The figures also illustrate the demand for information and the numbers of beneficiaries from research project work.

Although the overwhelming majority of site visitors were from the UK, visitors came from 60 countries with the highest numbers in Holland, Germany, the USA, France and Australia.

5.2 Permit Sales

Reports from angling providers and the tourism office suggest that permit sales increased in 2010 from 2009, with the Assynt Angling Association reporting record sales in 2010. Also, the rise in permit sales occurred in a context in which general tourism visits declined – something reported anecdotally throughout the year by accommodation providers and evidenced by a 11% drop in visits to the Tourist Information Centre. At the same time, TIC permit sales were up over 12%.

It is not possible to prove a causal link between the research, research website, and increased numbers of anglers in Assynt from 2009 to 2010.

However, it is likely that the website has played some part. It is worth noting that the research has also coincided with the publication of Cathel McLeod's guide booklet on angling in Assynt, which is profiled on the website.

5.3 Permit Survey – Angling Demand

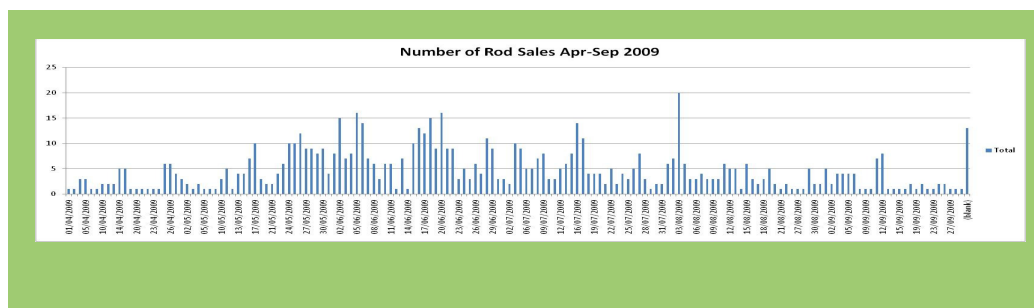
In response to comments made in both survey and interviews last year, the research project has commenced some work involving plotting individual permit sales across the year with both the Assynt Angling Association and Assynt Crofters' Trust. This will help generate more accurate data on how much pressure there is on trout angling capacity in Assynt..

There is a significant discrepancy between the perceptions of visiting anglers – who are fearful of there being 'too many anglers' going to Assynt – and those who provide and run angling in the area – who believe that given the large numbers of lochs in the area, there is ample capacity to increase angler numbers without any detrimental affect on fish stocks or anglers' experience.

In response , this research project has been using returns on permit stubs to plot the numbers of permits sold across the year both AAA (by zone) and ACT areas. From some *initial* work based on an AAA sample of 586 ticket stubs/758 rods in 2009, the following pattern is emerging, suggesting relatively low pressure from anglers:

- On only one day were there more than 20 rods fishing
- On 5 days there were 15 or more rods
- On 17 days there were 10 or more rods
- On 112 days there were 5 or less rods

We are due to receive all the permit stubs from 2009 and 2010 from both the AAG and ACT shortly and will provide a fuller report on angling pressure and capacity in early 2011.



6. Conclusions and Next Steps

6.1 Future Data Collection

It has required a significant amount of work to generate the responses that have been outlined in this research. In order to improve data collection in future, as well as to develop new aspects of work, it is necessary for more information about who fishes in Assynt to be collected during their visit.

However, unlike many fisheries, those providing trout fishing in Assynt do not require anglers to leave their names or contact details when they buy permits. This severely limits the ability to generate research contacts, participants and data.

We have discussed with some angling providers and permit sellers ways in which this could be achieved and we will be finalising these early in 2010.

However, given the dispersed nature of angling and anglers once they have bought their permits in Assynt, this task will require much greater encouragement for anglers to write their details at the point of sale. This should include, as a minimum, names and contact details.

6.2 Development Options that meet a number of needs

It is a core aim of a number of Assynt community organizations to increase employment opportunities and the economic welfare of local people. A particular feature of this is work to increase opportunities for employment, especially to help 'retain' younger people who would otherwise have to leave the area, and to increase inward investment and income.

The outcomes from this element of our research, taken together with the Assynt Visitor Survey, suggest that the Assynt community *could* increase the length of angler visits, the amount of anglers that do visit the area, the proportion of visitors who at least try angling and income from angling-related services.

However, it is also clear from our work this year and in 2009 that there is a very real concern

among visitors – both anglers and non-anglers – about 'over-development', 'over-fishing' and the protection of Assynt's wild and 'unique' nature.. Some of those who feel this most strongly are the most long-standing visitors. Undermining Assynt's qualities through insensitive or overly extensive development could result in the opposite of what such development might seek to achieve, namely a decline in visitors who can no longer experience Assynt in the way they currently do.

Debate around angling pressure in Assynt is being informed by our mapping of permit sale data. The work completed thus far suggests something of a mis-match between the interpretation of some visiting anglers and the actual current demand of angling on the area. The mapping of freshwater angling permit data for the previous two years should be completed in early 2011.

A careful balance must be struck between:

- What is achievable and feasible
- What delivers most benefit to local people, especially around key issues such as employment
- What has least 'impact' on the experience visitors currently get, whilst enhancing others
- What maximises new visits and income in low density periods of the year.

Such a balance is a common dilemma for remote and rural communities dependent to a significant extent on visitors and any developments must be sensible, sensitive and low impact.

6.3 Options Paper and Consultation

As part of the next stage of this project, we will produce a paper to inform ongoing discussion and consultation to take place in early spring. The outcomes of the discussion and consultation process will direct the work we will undertake in 2011 and contribute to the future social and community benefit of angling in Assynt.

Contact: Adam Brown, Project manager,
Substance: adam@substance.coop

ⁱ http://www.resources.anglingresearch.org.uk/sites/resources.anglingresearch.org.uk/files/Research_Task_3_Assynt_Angling_Rural_Areas.pdf

ⁱⁱ SQW (2006) Economic Impact From Angling on the Tweed River System

ⁱⁱⁱ SQW (2006): p33.

^{iv} MacLeod, K (2007) Assynt Area Profile, Assynt Office Services

^v Source: Highland Council: <http://www.highland.gov.uk> accessed on 17.12.10

^{vi} *Ibid*