

## RNLI | Research Project ID: 12-13a

# Coastal anglers audience profiling

**Sponsor:** RNLI Coastal Safety  
**Department:** RNLI Operations Research Unit  
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**Contractor:** Substance  
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**This research sought to examine the attitudes and behaviours of sea anglers and the varying degrees of risk that they face. This is the first large-scale piece of research into sea angling in the UK.**

## Summary

Angling is one of the largest participation sports/activities in the UK, with estimates of up to 4M taking part. Recreational sea anglers form a large group of coastal users in the UK with estimates varying between 1M<sup>1</sup> and 1.9M<sup>2</sup>.

Unlike recreational freshwater anglers, who have a legal requirement to hold a rod licence in England and Wales and are more likely to be members of clubs and/or will buy permits to fish on certain waters, sea anglers can fish (almost) anywhere, without permits and without a rod licence.

RNLI statistics show that 1,238 anglers were rescued by lifeboats in 2013, including 29 anglers whose lives were saved. Analysis of the National Water Safety Forum's WAID database by the RNLI indicates that there were 9 deaths angling from the shore or at sea in 2013<sup>3</sup>.

There is little published research on the safety and attitudes of sea anglers, so the RNLI commissioned this study to help understand those taking part in the sport.

Substance used its extensive database of anglers (drawn mostly from the National Angling Survey in 2012) to publicise the research, along with assistance from the Angling Trust, Scottish Federation of Anglers and Welsh Federation of Anglers.

This research explores the challenges of promoting safety to this audience, the varying degrees of risk sea anglers face, and suggestions about how to promote safety messages to different segments.

[All references to anglers in this report refer to sea anglers.]



Photo: Shutterstock

<sup>1</sup> DEFRA (2013). *Sea Angling 2012 – a survey of recreational sea angling activity and economic value in England*.

<sup>2</sup> Simpson D and Mawle GW. *Public Attitudes to Angling 2010*, Environment Agency, Bristol.

<sup>3</sup> RNLI analysis of Water Incident Database Report, National Water Safety Forum. *UK water-related fatalities 2013*

## Research aims and objectives

This project aimed to collect and analyse information on sea anglers' participation in the sport and their attitudes to safety and risk.

The specific objectives for this research were to:

- segment/categorise the population of coastal anglers in the UK according to their demographic characteristics, their level of participation in the sport and their attitude to safety/risk.
- conduct qualitative research with coastal anglers to further explore attitudes to risk and identify the most effective methods to communicate future safety messages to them
- pilot the involvement of RNLI volunteers in data collection and surveying and to help inform future research by the Coastal Safety Team.



## Method and approach

The research was undertaken between January and April 2013. With the relatively short time period for data collection and specific season in terms of the sea angling calendar, it was predicted that there would be lower numbers angling, with these being the more experienced.

This timing may have omitted the holiday, occasional and novice anglers and resulted in a bias towards frequent anglers. To avoid this, the research adopted a multi-faceted approach to help offset potential bias.

The research included:

- review of
  - literature of angler participation, audience profiling and attitudes to risk
  - angler research data
  - RNLI data
- qualitative research with angling organisations and individuals
  - semi-structured interviews
  - focus groups
- a quantitative survey with data collected via
  - online survey
  - phone interviews
  - face-to-face interviews.

### Qualitative research

The qualitative research was carried out to provide:

- more in-depth knowledge of the different types of sea angler and their motivations, habits and attitudes
- a qualitative explanation of some of the quantitative findings

- illustrative examples for use in profile modelling
- identify any common safety issues and test risk attitudes and scenarios more effectively.

The qualitative research was conducted in two ways:

- semi-structured interviews were based on a sample drawn from the database of anglers, reflecting a range of frequency, location and age
- four focus groups were held in Littlehampton, West Sussex; Glasgow; and Amble, Northumberland.

### Quantitative research

The quantitative research was carried out to provide the principal data and adopted three approaches to the collection of the data:

#### 1. Online survey

An online survey was conducted using Survey Monkey and was publicised through:

- Substance's database – over 5,000 anglers, who had indicated that they do some sea angling and were happy to be contacted for future research, were emailed twice in a 4-week period with links to the survey
- angling organisations, angling press and angling internet forums
- distribution, by Substance and RNLI volunteers, of 6,000 cards with the survey address to sea angling localities (tackle shops, RNLI lifeboat stations, retail and catering outlets).

A web page was set up providing information about the project and linked to the survey.

#### 2. Phone interviews

Sea anglers were invited to take part in phone interviews, targeting sea anglers who fished less frequently.

#### 3. Face-to-face interviews

Site-based face-to-face surveys were carried out at coastal locations in Northumberland, Cornwall, West Sussex and Yorkshire, as well as at an event at Glasgow Angling Centre. These provided a more random sample of sea anglers, conducted at arranged times, at angling club meetings and some while fishing.

The use of RNLI volunteers conducting face-to-face surveys was also piloted in Cleethorpes, Cleveland, Fowey, Poole, Rhyl and other parts of north Wales, Suffolk, Tenby, Weston-super-Mare and Weymouth.



## Response rates

Research method	Target	Number of survey respondents
Online survey	600	1,563
Face-to-face interview		
- Substance	50	90
- RNLI volunteers	50	167
Phone interview	50	18
<b>Total</b>	<b>750</b>	<b>1,838</b>

Although optional, the majority of the respondents provided demographic information including their location, gender, age, employment and income. Any respondent who was under 18 was excluded, providing a total survey population of 1,745.

## Analysis

- Demographic indicators and angling participation habits provided a profile, enabling us to understand more about the 'average' sea angler.
- Attitudes to risk (in angling and in general), and angling precautions and experiences, were analysed to identify an average against which high and low risk groups could be measured.
- A risk score matrix was developed and scores were weighted so that some responses were weighted as greater risk and some as lower risk. A risk score was then applied to each respondent and these scores were used to conduct further analysis to identify whether people who go sea angling frequently are statistically more risky in their approach to sea angling than those who go less often, or vice versa.
- A statistical analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to determine what indicators could be used to identify groups with a higher and lower risk score. For example, can different age bands or number of days a year someone goes fishing be used to identify people who had a higher risk score?
- Both quantitative and qualitative data were used to provide sea angler audience segments, with an indication of risk.
- Feedback from anglers was used to determine how any safety campaign might be conducted.

## Key findings

### Demographics

- The overwhelming majority of respondents were male (98%).
- Over half were aged between 41 and 60 (57%). Comparison with those holding rod licences suggests that sea anglers are slightly older than freshwater anglers.
- Nearly half (45%) were employed, with a quarter (26%) retired.
- The vast majority (84%) fished in England, with 10% in Wales, 4% in Scotland and 2% in Northern Ireland.

### Sea angling participation and behaviour

The time of year, changes during the course of anglers' lives, weather, tides and availability of fish are all factors that determine how often sea anglers go fishing.

### Days angling each year

Frequency of angling	Number of days angling each year	Survey percentage (%)	Self-defined percentage (%)
Infrequent/ Occasional	0-10	33.6	36.2
Regular	11-40	36.7	26.2
Frequent	41-100	20.6	22.2
Very frequent	101+	9.1	15.4

- When asked to self-define the frequency, 64% define themselves as regular to very frequent sea anglers. Less than 10% fished a handful of times in the last few years.
- Night-time fishing is most popular in Winter.
- 25% do most of their fishing on holiday or in unfamiliar places and, of these, 61% are occasional anglers.
- Fishing from the beach is by far the most common angling location (32%), followed by angling from a private boat (19%).
- Most anglers go fishing with friends (48%), while 18% go fishing with a member of their family. However, most notably, nearly a quarter (23%) go fishing on their own most often.
- Most sea anglers (92%) usually go fishing where there are other anglers around but over a quarter (29%) sometimes fish where there are no other anglers.
- Relaxing and getting away from things is the top reason for sea angling (38%), followed by being outdoors and active (24%) and catching a particular species of fish (24%). The latter is more important for those who define themselves as 'expert' anglers.

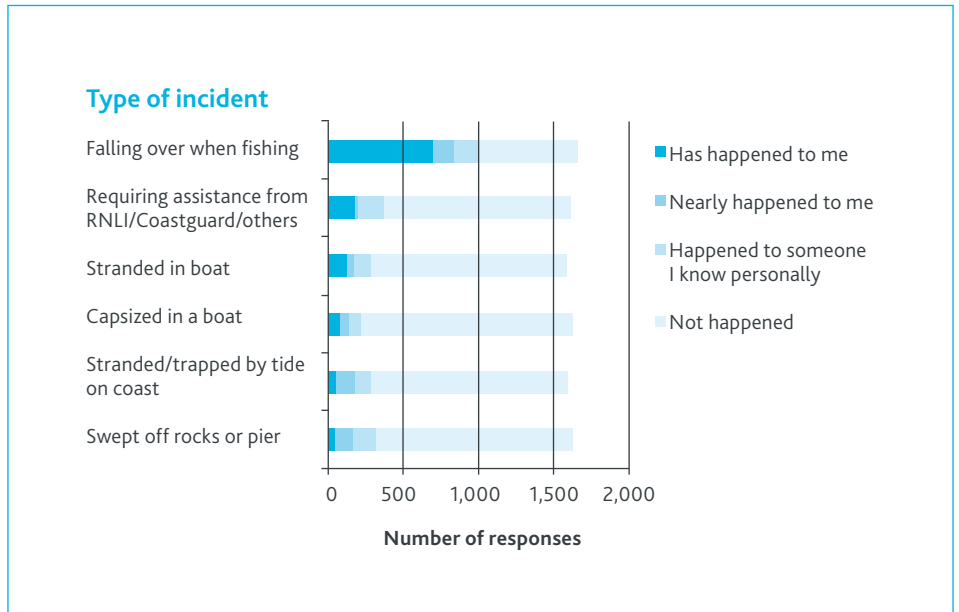


### Experience of incidents

The most frequent incident was found to be falling over when fishing (41%). Although it is the least serious of the incidents, it does suggest that many anglers experience something that could lead to a more serious difficulty, especially if on rocks or in a boat.

Generally, it was surprising how many sea anglers had experienced an incident themselves or knew of others who had. Given the nature of sea angling, some saw this as almost inevitable.

The experience of incidents did, however, tend to generate changes in angler behaviour: 'After the first scare I had, I now wear a vest to give me buoyancy.'



### Views on other anglers and other activities

Most sea anglers regard themselves as safe but regard other kinds of sea anglers as most at risk, with 40% saying inexperienced and infrequent sea anglers were very high risk. Only 6% thought that very frequent anglers, and 2% thought that frequent anglers, were very high risk. This was not, however, borne out by the risk scoring, where more frequent anglers (>100 days each year) have the highest risk score.

Most anglers also view other activities as riskier than theirs, which included diving (highest risk), using jet skis (next highest), kayaking, powerboating, swimming and surfing. Only walking on a rocky shore was deemed to be less risky and 41% said it was about the same risk as sea angling.

### Identifying sea angler risk

The more experienced and frequent sea anglers took some precautions but these were not comprehensive and were inconsistent. Over two thirds (67%) stayed out longer than intended and nearly half (46%) sometimes went fishing when they knew the weather was going to deteriorate. Only a small minority (10%) who fish from the shore wear lifejackets and even boat anglers who have a lifejacket on the boat sometimes don't wear it. The vast majority (83%) sometimes fish in places they don't know well and some will go down to waves to retrieve a line.

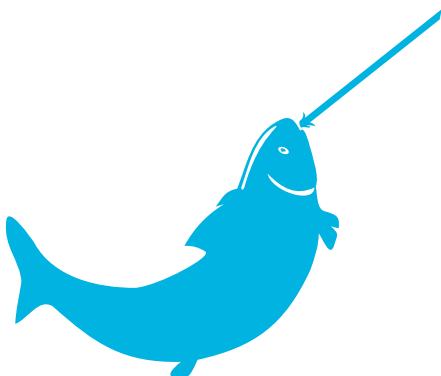


Photo: RNLI/Nathan Williams

Our research identified the following risk categories:

Higher risk	Lower risk
Younger sea anglers (aged 18–30 and 31–40)	Older age groups (51–70 and over 70s)
Frequent and very frequent sea anglers (who fish over 100 times a year)	Less frequent sea anglers (fishing 11–40 days a year)
Specialist sea anglers	Experienced but not expert sea anglers
Fishing from rocks	Fishing from man-made shoreline

The higher risk groups also go sea angling on their own, don't get information from angling clubs, information centres or tackle shops. Lower risk groups often go sea angling with a club, go where there are other anglers and, as well as angling from the shore, go sea angling from charter boats.



## Sea angling segments

Using both quantitative and qualitative research, five segments of sea anglers have been defined. Analysis also identified where high and low risk groups differed from the mean (average). The segments are ranked in order of risk from highest to lowest:

### Segment 1 – Novice/young anglers

Novice/young anglers, between 18 and 40 years old, have some experience but may not be expert or specialist. Motivated by catching fish, they are regular anglers, fishing with friends, and are more likely to fish from rocks than from a private boat. They are also more likely to drink alcohol on occasions, fish at night and go fishing when the weather deteriorates.

**'I'm not expert by any means and am still learning, but I buy all the books and magazines and am on the forums all the while.'**



### Segment 2 – Rock anglers

Rock anglers are more likely to be specialist and knowledgeable, pursuing particular species of fish such as cod, which involves fishing at night, from rocks, often in bad weather and in Winter. They are more likely to fish alone and in unfamiliar places, often going extra distances to remote spots in an effort to catch their fish. Although they take some precautions, they are inconsistent in their approach. They are least likely to say that they wear a lifejacket, less likely to take a mobile phone and less likely to tell someone where they are going.

**'If you can get to these spots, you don't normally get people fishing them ... I'll go walking, I'll take lightweight fishing gear with me and go walking miles along the coast, and I'll clamber down the rocks.'**



### Segment 3 – Dedicated specialists

These anglers are very experienced sea anglers, fishing over 100 times a year, and are motivated by targeting specific species and size of fish at different times of the year. They are more likely to fish in places they know, fish from a private boat and sometimes fish with a club, but they are also much more likely to fish at night, fish when the weather deteriorates and fish on their own. The frequency of fishing and the extent to which they go to catch fish (rather than for other motivations, such as being outdoors) makes them prone to accidents. This segment may contain some of the most well-informed and experienced anglers, frequenting angling clubs, reading angling press and using angling forums. However, their fishing frequency means that they are more likely to experience extreme events and/or accidents.

'I literally read everything to do about boating and I've got all the latest technology and I've done it for a long time – over 20 years – and I've been in some difficult seas. I think people that go with me think that I'm competent in handling the boat ... I know how to catch fish ... and we catch what we set out to catch.'



### Segment 4 – Pleasure sea anglers: holidaymakers, dabblers and non-experts

The majority are aged 41–70 and are more likely to go fishing with their close family or friends as part of a wider leisure or holiday experience. They are motivated by being outdoors and active and are more likely to fish from a private boat, with some taking kayaks out. They are familiar with angling websites, tackle shops and retailers and get advice from other anglers. However, they fish less regularly, are less expert so are likely to know less and have less experience to call on, and those fishing on holiday or away from home may be unfamiliar with local conditions.

'I mainly fish places I do not know as I'm on holiday. [Not necessarily] remote spots as they are fairly near to built-up areas. Sea angling is an occasional and opportunistic thing for me and I don't go looking for long trips.'



**Segment 5 – Old hands (lowest risk)**

The older anglers (generally 70+) are more likely to be experienced but not expert although they may now fish less regularly around the coast. They are motivated more by being outdoors in better weather rather than targeting specific fish. They also fish more from a man-made shoreline than from rocks, perhaps due to ease of access, but they may go fishing on their own. These anglers are less likely to be reached via websites, but may still have links to clubs, including volunteering as committee members.

**'[I go] to suit the tide but I won't fish the tide if it's late at night or early in the morning ... I'm not as steady as I was, I have rheumatoid arthritis so it limits me, so that's why I tend to be a bit more of a fair weather angler thinking more about my safety.'**

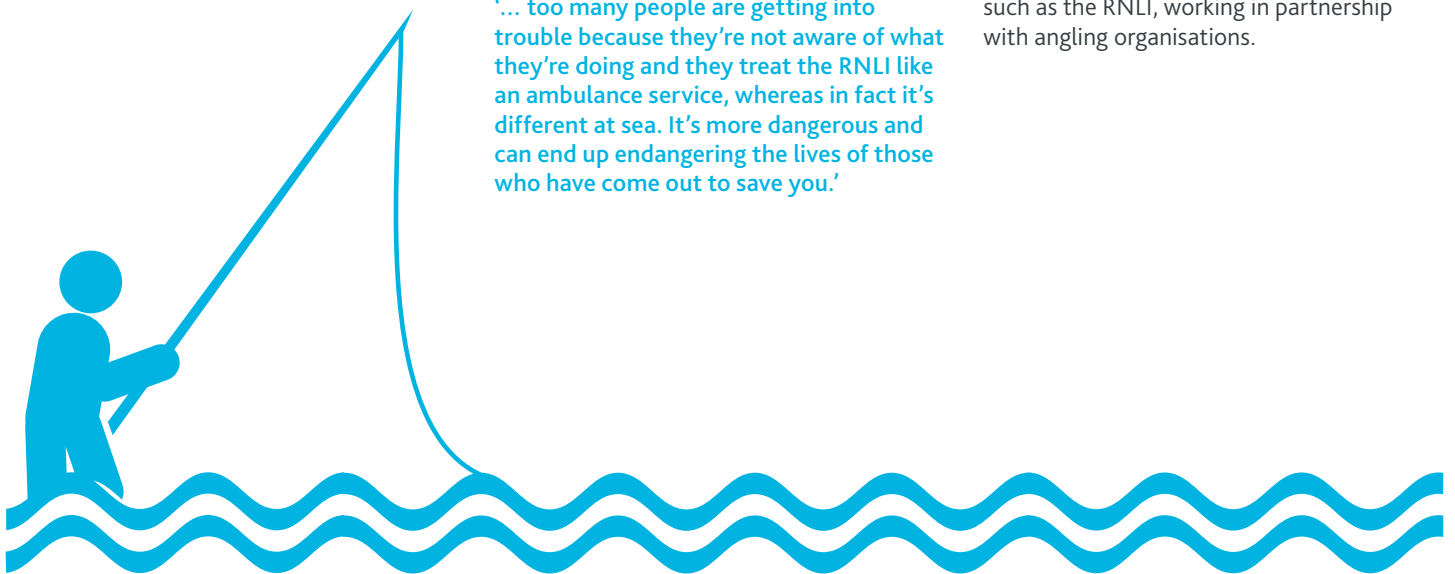
**Sea angling safety**

National and local organisations, angling trade representatives, members of the angling press and numerous respondents to the survey and interviewees all said that there is a safety concern with sea anglers that requires attention:

**'... too many people are getting into trouble because they're not aware of what they're doing and they treat the RNLI like an ambulance service, whereas in fact it's different at sea. It's more dangerous and can end up endangering the lives of those who have come out to save you.'**

The vast majority agreed there was a need for a safety campaign but some felt it would still prove difficult to change people's behaviour and overcome angler apathy.

In delivering any campaign, sea anglers felt it should be led by a trusted organisation such as the RNLI, working in partnership with angling organisations.



## How the RNLI is using the evidence



All of this research has already helped inform the development of targeted products and programmes promoting specific behaviours that impact on anglers' personal safety when fishing around the coast. This ranges from a national multi-channel media campaign, using key safety behaviours, right down to local targeted interventions in angling shops around the UK. The research has also helped gain credibility and support from key stakeholders and anglers themselves.

Further work by the RNLI will help target the different groups of sea anglers and continue to promote safe behaviour. In order to reduce accidents, fatalities and incidents where anglers need assistance, the RNLI is looking into ways to get sea anglers to be more consistent in the precautions they take.

The RNLI commissioned some follow-up research from Substance in March 2014 involving anglers who fish from the shore, predominantly from the rocks, and it explored the use (or non-use) of lifejackets.

Focus groups were conducted in Fife, Newcastle and Weymouth. The Weymouth group also generated feedback on some draft safety campaign messages and images.

For the latest safety advice for anglers, please see the Respect the Water section of the RNLI website at [RNLI.org](http://RNLI.org).

If you are interested in finding out more about this study, please contact Tom Walters, Research Manager for the Operations Department: [Thomas\\_Walters@rnli.org.uk](mailto:Thomas_Walters@rnli.org.uk).

## Further reading

Armstrong, M et al (2013). *Sea Angling 2012 – a survey of recreational sea angling activity and economic value in England*, DEFRA. Available at: [seaangling2012.org](http://seaangling2012.org).

Brown, A, Djohari, N and Stolk, P (2012). *Fishing for answers: The final report of the social and community benefits of angling research*, Manchester: Substance. Available at [resources.anglingresearch.org.uk](http://resources.anglingresearch.org.uk).

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