

FAQs: Questions and answers

Why is there need for surveys of sea angling?

There is no doubt that sea angling is an important activity in the UK, providing social and economic benefits particularly for coastal communities. Therefore, accurate estimates of recreational catches would greatly improve the management of the stocks helping to achieve conservation goals and eventually improve the availability of fish to sea anglers. Data from angling surveys will help the Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities (IFCAs) and Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) to build a strong evidence base on angling activity and its economic and social value at a regional and national scale, that can stand alongside the extensive data available on commercial fishing and other marine activities. This data set will also be utilised by angling bodies to develop their own position on sea angling.

The European Commission has also implemented legislation requiring EU member states to collect and report data on recreational catches. The objective of the legislation is to ensure there are adequate data on certain fish stocks where it is needed to give a clearer picture of how fishing activities are affecting the stocks. The EU Data Collection Framework (DCF) was set up to ensure adequate data on fish stocks and their fisheries are collected to support the scientific monitoring and assessment of the stocks. This requirement is likely to continue under the successor of the DCF – the EU Multi-Annual Programme (EU-MAP) – although the species and reporting frequency may change. In response to this, the UK has developed a new survey programme called Sea Angling 2016 that aims to deliver sea angling participation, effort, catches, and benefits in the UK.

How do you know if a fish stock is being fished sustainably?

This requires accurate data on how many fish are being caught each year by all fishing activities along with other information, such as from research surveys, to monitor stock trends. Without data on recreational fishery catches, only part of the picture is available for important recreational angling stocks such as bass. This could result in greater uncertainty about the status of a stock, which makes it more difficult to know if the restoration of stocks to a healthy condition is on track. Sea angling surveys are designed to provide the type of data on recreational catches and releases needed in future years to improve our knowledge of the trends and sustainability of stocks.

Who is involved?

Sea Angling 2016 project is run collaboratively involving the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (Cefas www.cefas.co.uk) and Substance (www.substance.net; www.resources.anglingresearch.org.uk). The project is being funded by the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in England and by the devolved governments of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and is also supported by national sea angling associations:

What impact will it have on the development of sea angling?

If sea angling is to be strongly represented in processes around fish conservation, there is a need for up-to-date factual evidence to stand alongside data on other marine activities. It is vital that information on sea angling is as accurate as possible – in terms of how often people go fishing, what is caught, what is released and what is contributed to the economy. The data will be freely available, so can be used by angling organisations to develop policies on important issues facing sea angling.

Are data going to be provided to Europe?

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The EU Control Regulation requires the reporting of recreational catches of depleted stocks that are subject to EU recovery plans (such as cod), and applies only to registered recreational fishing boats such as charter boats. The EU Data Collection Framework (DCF) was set up to ensure adequate data on fish stocks and their fisheries are collected to support the scientific monitoring and assessment of the stocks. The main DCF requirement for the UK is to report recreational catches of bass, cod, salmon, eels, and all types of skates and sharks. Unlike the Control Regulation, the DCF covers all types of recreational fishing from boat and shore.

Should sea anglers be concerned that these data will lead to restrictions?

Some anglers believe that the purpose of angling surveys is ultimately to control sea angling. This is not the case, as the government would not wish to impose unnecessary regulatory burdens where they are not needed. However, where there is strong evidence that a fish stock is being overfished and badly depleted due to the combined effect of commercial and recreational fishing, all people involved in taking fish of this species from the sea should bear a responsibility to help conserve and restore the stock. Without good data on what is being caught by all types of fishing, it becomes very difficult to develop the most effective packages of measures to achieve this and to predict and monitor their outcome. A good example is European sea bass which appears to be overfished and in steady decline. The European Commission has made far-reaching proposals for controls on commercial fishing on bass, has increased the minimum landing size to 42cm, and has introduced bag limits for recreational fishing. They used data from sea angling surveys in England, Netherlands, France and Belgium to help develop measures and evaluate their impacts. National governments and angling bodies have also used data from the surveys to help develop their policies for discussion with the Commission. Further data is needed to adapt such management measures to future changes in stock size and recommended catch levels.

Today's generation of recreational sea anglers and commercial fishermen are still faced with challenges to restore stocks of fish following many decades of over-fishing during the 20th century. By the late 1990s, almost all the stocks around the UK for which good data are available were being fished unsustainably and were badly depleted. Stringent fishery management measures and extensive decommissioning of fishing boats has resulted in a progressive increase in the number of stocks being harvested sustainably since the 1990s. Sea angling surveys could highlight circumstances where anglers should play an important role along with commercial fishermen in this process of restoring vulnerable or over-exploited stocks, for example bass. In this case governments would seek to work with the angling sector to agree voluntary measures or to contribute as effectively as possible to development of international and domestic regulatory measures where there is a clear need for them.

Why is the focus on recreational sea angling when it is clear that commercial fishing has a much larger impact?

Commercial fisheries already have a heavy burden of catch reporting through EU log books, and there are large programmes of data collection by national fishery laboratories to establish the size and age compositions of catches, and quantities discarded. These are key inputs to scientific assessments of most fish stocks. For important recreational stocks,

estimates of recreational catches would improve the accuracy of assessments of the state of the stocks. This would help to achieve conservation goals and eventually improve the availability of fish to sea anglers.

What happens if anglers do not want to participate in the collection of data?

Quite simply, the more people willing to take part, the better the quality of the information produced. And the more accurate the data, the better represented sea angling will be. It is a popular misconception that the absence of data would result in sea angling being ignored when fishery managers are considering how best to conserve fish stocks. In contrast, if there is evidence that a fish stock is in need of stronger conservation measures, management decisions may have to be based on a worst-case view where there are large uncertainties in knowledge of the fish stocks and what is being caught. If accurate information is available about recreational angling, those decisions will be based on what is actually the case. For this reason, it is in everyone's interests to have accurate, verifiable data on sea angling so that it has a clearer picture of the state of stocks and sea angling's value to the economy. This will facilitate working with sea angling bodies to develop more effective voluntary or regulatory conservation measures if needed, and to contribute more effectively to national and international policy development. In the longer term this can only be to the benefit of sea angling, particularly where there is a need to restore important recreational angling stocks to healthier and more productive levels.

What are the potential negative effects of angling surveys?

As stated above, the UK Government would not wish to impose unnecessary regulatory burdens on sea anglers. However, angling surveys may indicate that there are species in particular areas where recreational activity could be considered to be having a significant additional impact, which is the case for bass and could also be true for some other species. If this is the case, UK governments would initially prefer to develop voluntary measures which will reduce the recreational impact on the stock, but not affect the enjoyment of the sport. This may take the form of catch-and-release after a certain number of fish have been retained or voluntarily avoiding areas where large quantities of small fish are being caught. However where there is a clearly established need for wider and more formal regulations to conserve a stock, governments and the European Commission would seek information from all fisheries including data collected during recreational fishing surveys especially those that we are required to do by European regulations. This may be seen as a negative effect of surveys but in reality the absence of such data could lead to even more precautionary measures and more restrictive controls due to a greater uncertainty about the total impacts of fishing.

Of course, angling surveys may demonstrate that recreational activity is having a negligible effect on stocks, and there is no need to seek additional voluntary or regulatory measures for those stocks. However we cannot assume that will be the case, which is why it is important to have data collected as accurately as possible. Well-informed decisions are important for the benefit of all stakeholders.

What survey methods will be used?

The methods outlined build upon the strong base developed in Sea Angling 2012, and will utilise data from the original programme alongside new surveys. Sea Angling 2012 tried a number of different data collection methodologies including on-site surveys of shore, catch diary for charter boats, and online catch surveys. These different survey methods differed in levels of response, bias and precision of the data collected. This knowledge was used with experience from across the world to develop the new Sea Angling 2016 programme which has three components:

- A nationwide face-to-face survey to estimate fishing participation and effort, using questions added to the National Watersports Survey in 2015.
- Identification of a representative sample of people who fish for recreation in the sea and who will be asked if they are willing to keep diaries to record their fishing activities, catches and expenditure on fishing throughout 2016. An initial survey of people from this list will be carried out to find out about how much and what type of recreational fishing they carry out, and which part of the UK they fish most often.
- A panel survey involving the completion of diaries throughout 2016 by a sample of people from the list of recreational sea fishers identified in the previous step. These anglers will be asked to keep a record of trips made, catches and releases of fish, sizes (lengths and weights) and expenditure. These will be collated on a monthly basis for one year.

Estimates of recreational sea angling catches and trip expenditure from the diary panel will then be used to derive estimates for the whole population of sea anglers, based on estimates of the total nationwide numbers of sea anglers from the National Watersports Survey and the previous Office of National Statistics survey results in Sea Angling 2012. The different surveys will be broken down by region, demographic characteristics and frequency of angling to correct for any biases caused by the diary panel not being fully representative of the total population of sea anglers.

There are many potential ways of collecting information on recreational sea angling, all of which have different strengths. The new design has been selected to give a reasonable level of precision and minimise bias using experience from Sea Angling 2012, and used routinely by other scientists in Europe, USA, Australia and New Zealand. Overall, this design was thought to provide the best value for money and give reasonable estimates.

How will stakeholder input be collected?

Although there is no official steering group for this survey, input will be requested from a number of key organisations. Updates will also be reported on the project website.

When will Sea Angling 2016 surveys start?

The National Watersports Survey was carried out in autumn 2015. Anglers will be contacted in December 2015 to complete a short questionnaire and the diary survey will take place from January to December 2016.

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