

Coarse fishing close season on English rivers

Appendix 4 - An assessment of the perceived risks of removing the close season

Background

Coarse angling in England on rivers (and some stillwaters and canals) is subject to a coarse fish close season between 15 March and 15 June, inclusive. It is maintained to protect coarse fish stocks from additional angling pressure in the period around their typical spawning period. However, prohibiting angling on rivers also has other effects, including the reduction of the social and economic benefits from angling.

The close season has been maintained on a precautionary basis – revoking or changing it would entail running a number of risks, most importantly that to maintenance of fish stocks. England Fisheries Group established a study group, comprising representatives from the Angling Trust, Institute of Fisheries Management and the Environment Agency, to examine the available evidence on the effects of the coarse fish close season in England, particularly on rivers, and whether collecting additional evidence to increase our understanding of likely effects of changes to the close season on rivers was possible.

Risk assessment

To complement the literature review and other evidence, the study group conducted an assessment of a number of perceived risks associated with removing the close season. To do this, we sought the expert judgement of a number of fisheries professionals - eight in total, comprising scientists and managers with experience in coarse fisheries, as well as members of the study group itself.

We posed a range of questions relating to the perceived impact of angling during the close season on coarse fisheries. Participants were asked to assess each of the specific risks for each of the main coarse fish species (roach; bream; perch; chub; barbel; pike; dace; and grayling) and in different fishery types - large lowland rivers and "other rivers" (upper reaches lowland; middle reaches upland; small lowland).

We adopted conventional risk assessment scoring of impact x likelihood.

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Risk = impact x likelihood		Likelihood		
		1 - Low	2 - Medium	3 - High
Impact	1 - Low	1 (low)	2 (low)	3 (medium)
	2 - Medium	2 (low)	4 (medium)	6 (high)
	3 - High	3 (medium)	6 (high)	9 (high)

Additionally, respondents were asked to score their confidence in their assessment of individual risks – 1 (low confidence) to 3 (high confidence).

Please note, the responses simply comprise the collated individual views of a selected audience. Although these are based on considerable experience of coarse fisheries management and angling, they are not based on any peer-reviewed scientific evidence.

The following charts show the average of the perceived risk assessed by of the respondents for each of the main coarse fish species. The red line indicates a higher level of risk (score ≥ 6).

Results

The key results from the assessment are:

the most sensitive species to close season fishing/disturbance are perceived to be barbel, chub, grayling, dace and pike. The least sensitive are perceived to be roach, perch and bream;

the highest perceived risks are increased mortality and reduced spawning success due to catching and handling spawning fish, and disturbance of spawning aggregations (although the last of these was skewed towards certain species, including dace and barbel);

impacts are generally considered to be greater in smaller rivers/upper reaches, where populations of the species of concern are present, e.g. the impacts on barbel spawning aggregations in smaller rivers/middle reaches;

the respondents report a high average degree of confidence in their perceptions of risk - for each question and for each species, the mean confidence in the assessment of risk was between 2.2 and 2.6 out of 3.0.

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