



Further Information about the Catchwise Sea Angling Survey Project

WHO is Doing Catchwise?

The Catchwise Project is carried out in partnership between research company, **Substance**, angling governing body, the **Angling Trust** and government marine science organisation **Cefas** (Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science). It is funded by Defra under the Fisheries Industry Partnership Scheme (FISP).

WHY is the Catchwise Project Being Conducted?

The data collected will be provided to national and local policy makers to make better informed decisions on fisheries management, as well as provide angling governing bodies and the sea angling community with information to help them develop their own views and policies. By having data that is accurate as possible about what is caught, released and spent by sea anglers in England and Wales, helps enable the sea angling community to demonstrate its real impact more effectively.

WHAT is Catchwise?

Catchwise runs from 2023 to 2025 and will be one of the largest studies of sea angling ever undertaken in the UK. It will involve:

- A face-to-face survey of hundreds of sea anglers fishing from the shore and private boats.
- An online survey of charter boat skippers.

It will survey sea anglers about:

- Their sea angling activity and experience – how often they fish and how long have they been doing it?
- Their sea angling session – when and where and what methods
- Their catches.
- Their spending and the benefits they get from fishing.

These data are used, alongside other surveys, to provide an estimate of the participation levels (numbers, frequency), catches by species and area, economic value of sea angling and its social impacts. This study runs alongside the Sea Angling Diary study but is distinct from it.

You can find out more here: www.catchwise.org

FAQs About Catchwise

Why is there need for surveys of sea angling?

There is no doubt that sea angling is an important activity, providing social and economic benefits particularly for coastal communities in the UK and elsewhere. Previous research has shown that:

- Sea angling makes a significant economic impact worth between £1.5 and £2 billion – supporting 15,000 jobs - to the UK economy when indirect effects are included¹.
- Understanding recreational sea angling catches is important for sustainable management of fish stocks².

Getting accurate data about the activity, catches, and spending of sea anglers is vital. It can then be used, alongside data available on commercial fishing and other marine activities, to greatly improve the management of fish stocks. This helps to achieve conservation goals and support improving the availability of fish to sea anglers. Data from this and other surveys helps Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), the Welsh Government and others such as Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities (IFCAs) and angling organisations understand sea angling's impact and value.

Until 2020, this work helped the UK Government fulfil a statutory requirement under the EU Data Collection Framework (DCF) to report recreational catches and releases of cod, sea bass, pollack, elasmobranchs, eel, salmon, and highly migratory species³.

Since leaving the EU, the UK is an independent coastal state with control over its territorial waters. Marine recreational fisheries are now embedded in UK fisheries management through the Fisheries Act⁴, alongside the provision for funding for development. This means to meet the objectives of the Fisheries Act, it is important to have biological, social, and economic data on recreational fisheries to inform Fisheries Management Plans. In addition, the UK has commitments to provide recreational fisheries data annually to the International Council for Exploitation of the Sea (ICES) for stock assessment and fisheries advice⁵.

How do I know information about my fishing won't be shared?

We have put in a number of measures to ensure that information from anglers is protected and no information is shared that you don't want to. You can read more about that [here](#).

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 sea bass and cod. 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

1 <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/sea-angling-in-the-uk-reports>

2 <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0201666>

3 EU Data Collection Framework (Council Regulation (EC) No 199/2008) and the Multi-Annual Programme (Council Regulation (EU) 2017/1004)

4 <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2020/22/contents/enacted>

5 <https://www.ices.dk/>

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?

- Substance – a research company who have delivered research on angling for over 18 years.
- The Angling Trust – the governing body for angling in England.
- Cefas – the government's marine science specialists.

Who Supports the Project?

The research is supported by a wide range of angling, fishery and marine organisations. The following organisations have been invited onto the project Advisory Group:

- Angling Trades Association (confirmed)
- Association of Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities (confirmed)
- Institute of Fisheries Management (confirmed)
- Welsh Government (confirmed)
- Welsh Federation of Sea Anglers/Angling Cymru
- Professional Boatman's Association
- Individual sea anglers and skippers

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

If sea angling is to be strongly represented in marine fishery management, there is a need for up-to-date 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 from much of this work is freely available in the [published reports](#). All data from the programme will be freely available, so can be used by angling organisations to develop policies on important issues facing sea angling. Consultation on new fisheries legislation has suggested a new and improved role for recreational sea angling within wider marine fisheries management. This emphasises the need for better data on sea angling to properly inform that management.

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.

Sea angling surveys could highlight circumstances where anglers should play an important role along with commercial fishermen in this process of restoring vulnerable or overexploited 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 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 Government would not wish to impose unnecessary regulatory burdens on sea anglers. However, angling and other 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 sea 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. 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 are used?

Catchwise has two main elements:

- A nationwide (England and Wales) face-to-face survey of sea anglers fishing from the shore and private boats, at sites selected at random to ensure a representative sample.
- A nationwide online survey of charter boat skippers in England and Wales, selected at random each month.

There are many potential ways of collecting information on recreational sea angling, all of which have different strengths. This design has been selected to give the best possible level of precision and minimise bias using experience from previous studies, and used routinely by other scientists in Europe, USA, Australia and New Zealand.

How do we work with the angling community?

A formal Advisory Group will be in place for the project. Those invited to take part include:

- Angling Trades Association
- Association of Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities
- Institute of Fisheries Management
- Welsh Government
- Welsh Federation of Sea Anglers / Angling Cymru
- Professional Boatman's Association
- Peer review scientists
- Individual anglers and skippers

Contact:

Catchwise@substance.net



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs