

CONSERVATION CODE FOR SEA ANGLERS

Sea anglers are natural conservationists. Spending time by or on the sea instills an appreciation of the environment and most anglers develop commitment and respect for the wildlife and habitats around them.

This guide is intended to help you to reduce any impact your angling activities may have on marine wildlife and habitats and to inform those whose actions, usually through inexperience or carelessness, can endanger the marine environment.

This will both help to conserve the health of our coast and preserve the good image of angling.

These guidelines have been drawn up by a partnership of sea angling bodies and conservation organisations, and they are intended for everyone.

We all have a part to play.

Be an ambassador for angling!

ACCESS TO LAND AND FISHING

Fishing from the foreshore is a right enshrined in Magna Carta. However, this right does not permit you to walk on private land to reach the foreshore without permission. If in doubt, keep to recognised rights of way. Access may also be limited in some areas - for instance on military sites.

- If driving to your venue, keep to established roads and tracks. Park sensibly, preferably in a recognised parking area.
- Do not block access points for landowners, farmers and emergency vehicles.
- Launching of boats should be from an approved location.

FISHING IN THE VICINITY OF OTHERS

Try not to inconvenience or endanger other users of the shore. Remember, they probably have as much right to be there as you do!

BUYING AND COLLECTING BAIT

Many anglers collect or dig for their own baits. Following the points below will help to ensure future bait stocks and protect other wildlife.

- When digging bait ensure that all holes and trenches are completely backfilled. This will help restore the habitat and minimise casualties of other animals found in the spoil. It also reduces the risks to other beach users and retains the areas landscape value.



- Do not dig within the vicinity of conservation areas or moorings and slipways
Many shores have designations that indicate their high conservation value. Be aware of these and help to protect them. Avoid digging around moorings and slipways to ensure the safety of boat and other foreshore users.
- Minimise disturbance to feeding or roosting birds, particularly over winter.
Disturbance can prevent birds from feeding and delay or prevent recovery from arduous migratory flights. Birds will also waste energy trying to avoid you.
- Gather only what you need for a planned fishing trip. Take any unused bait home for disposal or store for next time.
This will avoid wasting a resource important not only to the angler, but also to other foreshore gatherers such as feeding birds and fish. Discarded bait is unpleasant for other shore users, especially on piers or promenades.
- When collecting peeler, soft crabs or shellfish always carefully return rocks and weed to their original positions. This minimizes the impacts on other marine life. Animals and plants that live under boulders will dry out if left exposed to the sun and air and could be crushed by careless handling.
- Do not take berried (egg carrying) crabs and never take undersize edible crabs. This will help to sustain crab stocks.
- Try to ensure crab tiles/traps are not laid in areas of conservation value or in a manner to cause danger or annoyance to other foreshore users. Placing of tiles/traps on a mud flat can change the habitat. They can be a navigational hazard and make an area unsightly.
- When fishing for mackerel or other bait fish, remember to abide by minimum size limits and take only sufficient for your needs. Bait fish play an important part in the food web, and future stocks need protection.

If you prefer to buy bait from a supplier, unless it is frozen, always try to use a species that is native to British and Irish waters. If you use baits that are not naturally found in these waters, there is a risk of introducing a species or a parasite that could harm native wildlife, possibly affecting your ability to gather bait in the future and the health of the marine environment. If in doubt, avoid non-frozen baits produced outside Europe.

ACCIDENTAL LOSS OF LINE AND TACKLE

Loss of tackle is caused mainly by snagging on a rocky seabed or on seaweeds.

Some tackle loss is inevitable. However, good rig design, using gear appropriate to the ground you are fishing on and taking care of your tackle will all help minimise your losses. Because monofilament line persists in the environment and can continue to be a hazard to wildlife for many years, it is loss of line that presents the greatest potential hazard to the environment.

The following points will help reduce tackle loss, helping the environment and your pocket:

- Rigs can be set up so that a snagged weight will be discarded when pressure is applied via the main line, and thus enable the whole line to be retrieved. (The rotten bottom).
- Snood (hook) lengths should always be of a lower breaking strain than the main line.
- Use the appropriate breaking strain line for the ground you are fishing.

Losing tackle is expensive. Consider using substitutes to lead weights where snags are unavoidable (old spark plugs, stones, bags of sand have all been used successfully on venues where distance casting is unimportant)

- Check the condition of your line regularly. Replace if old or damaged. Dispose of old line sensibly. Burn it or cut it into short lengths

KEEPING YOUR CATCH

One of the joys of sea angling is the opportunity to keep a portion of the catch for the table. Before killing the fish, first make sure it is above the minimum landing size.

- Return all undersize fish alive to the sea. Contact your local Sea Fisheries Committee for information on national and local minimum landing sizes. This is a legal requirement to help ensure the conservation of stocks. Avoid fishing in areas where undersize fish are often caught.

If your fish is over the minimum landing size for that species and you wish to keep it:

- Kill your catch quickly.
Dispatching your fish quickly and cleanly with a blow to the back of the lower head will ensure a quick death.



CATCH AND RELEASE

In the interest of conserving stocks and maintaining biodiversity, anglers are encouraged to return fish to the sea in a healthy condition. Many species survive after catch and release.

Whether you keep or return your catch, the welfare of the fish should be uppermost in your mind.

The following pointers will help ensure your catch is returned healthy to the sea.

- Where possible and where safe to do so, release your fish while it is still in the water.

- If you have to bring the fish ashore or onboard to unhook it, try to use a net (never gaff a fish you intend to release), handle the fish with wet hands and minimise the time the fish is kept out of the water. These measures will improve the chances of fish surviving on return.
- If you want to photograph or weigh your fish, handle firmly to prevent dropping or injury. A fish can injure itself struggling to escape, so hold firmly and have the camera or scales ready before starting to fish. Never hold a fish under the gill covers if it is to be returned.
- If you want to release all your fish, try using barbless or circle hooks. Barbless hooks may mean you lose a few more fish, but returning the fish you catch is easier for you and the fish. The correct use of a disgorger will also increase the chance of releasing a healthy fish.
- If you catch a tagged fish, send the complete tag and details of the species and length of the fish and location and time of capture to the address shown or to a local Fisheries Office. Tagging is a method of collecting valuable information on fish stocks and their movements. In some cases, please note that it is requested that tagged fish (e.g. large common skate) should be returned alive with the tag intact, and details of the tag number and date and location of capture sent to the address shown.

Returning fish alive and healthy helps to sustain our sport!

COMPETITION ANGLING

Many anglers enjoy fishing competitions. In response to concerns about fish stocks and welfare, a growing number of competitions are organised on a conservation basis. It is recommended that anglers who wish to take account of these issues seek out the following types of competition:

- Measure and Return: Provided fish are above legal minimum landing size, 1 point is awarded per cm plus a fixed number of points per species (dependent upon species). The results are presented as points and the highest number wins.

- Weigh and Return: The fish are weighed by a steward, and then returned. The results are recorded by weight, and the heaviest catch wins the competition.
- Points per fish and return: Points are awarded per fish (graded per species). This can be customised to suit the area being fished. The winner is the angler with the highest total number of points.



NATURE CONSERVATION SITES

Conservation sites are recognised, either in law or by a voluntary body, as areas that contain, or are used by rare, vulnerable or threatened plants and animals for all, or part of their life cycles. They can sometimes be sanctuary or nursery areas to allow plants and animals to live and breed with the minimum of disturbance.

Recreational sea angling with rod and line is a public right on almost the whole of the coast, including all conservation sites. However, like all users and observers of the natural environment, each angler has a responsibility to the wildlife, other anglers and to the general public, to minimise their environmental impacts. Part of this responsibility is being aware of where and why conservation sites exist and what you can do to help or respect these.

To find out about conservation sites in your area, contact the following organisations. Ask for the number of the local office in your county.

In England, contact English Nature: Tel. 01733 455000
www.english-nature.org.uk
In Scotland, contact Scottish Natural Heritage:
Tel. 0131 447 4784
www.snh.org.uk
In Wales, contact The Countryside Council for Wales:
Tel. 01248 385500 www.ccw.gov.uk
In Northern Ireland contact the Environment and
heritage service: Tel. 028 9025 1477
www.ehsni.gov.uk
In the Republic of Ireland, contact Duchas:
Tel. 01 6472300
www.irlgov.ie/ealga

You may find there are agreements in place that ask you to avoid certain places at certain times of year to minimise disturbance to rare plants and animals or to reduce levels of digging or bait collecting in certain areas. Please remember that most of the things you may be asked to do (or not to do) will benefit the wildlife and ultimately the health of the environment

FISH CONSERVATION SITES

To find out about designated nursery sites for fish, contact your local Sea Fisheries Committee (England and Wales only) or MAFF District Fishery office. They should be able to provide you with a map or information about these areas.

LITTER

Recreational users – including sea anglers- are responsible for about a 1/3 of litter found on UK beaches. Litter is an eyesore and costs local communities in clean-up operations and reduced amenity value. Plastic litter is particularly dangerous because it is strong and does not degrade and items like six-pack rings, fishing line and carrier bags can entangle and choke wildlife.

- Reducing litter protects the environment, marine resources and local economies.
- Be prepared - take a bag with you especially for rubbish.
- Be responsible – Leave your venue cleaner than when you arrived
- Take litter home!

POLLUTION

Always report anything unusual e.g. pollution or items washed ashore, to the Environment Agency Tel: 0800 807060. The Agency will respond as quickly as possible.

All the information in the guidelines above should be available from recognised sea angling organisations throughout the UK and Ireland. Contact any of them for local codes which will provide specific information suited to your area. If you would like to comment on any aspect of this code, please contact:

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