

# 2015



## Policy document for coarse angling

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Friday 16<sup>th</sup> January 2015

## Preamble

The Angling Times U.K. Readers voted Ireland the best foreign destination for British Coarse Anglers in 2014. This can be contrasted with advice given to these same UK anglers by top angling show “Greater Rod Race” back in 2009. Then the advice was to stay away because all coarse fish had been poached to, all but, extinction. It should be noted that the TV producers did not ask NCFFI for advice on angling venues in Ireland.

We have worked over those 5 years to promote our festivals and the quality of our angling often in partnership with IFI. Fishermen talking to fishermen carry a “street cred.” that is difficult for state agencies to match, while angling federations simply do not have the resources to deliver without a partnership arrangement with IFI, Local Government and other state agencies.

NCFFI aims to promote, develop and grow Coarse Angling Sport, both competitive and recreational, in Ireland. Tourist anglers play an important part in helping achieve this aim. Coarse angling venues improve through use. All fish are fed and returned alive and well to the water. Possibly unique in the angling world, coarse angling sport improves with increased numbers of anglers visiting.

Clearly NCFFI’s interests lie in promoting angling tourism. Most of our clubs hold festivals and open competitions to encourage and welcome overseas anglers. We invest much time and energy on social media promoting these events. As most events are “Full Payout” we do this at our own expense.

Added to this, our international teams and managers act as ambassadors for Ireland in the competitive angling world. This, again, is mainly at their own expense.

We invest heavily in our sport and rural Ireland benefits economically from our efforts. As a major stake holder we present this policy document with a view to improving coarse fishing for all



## Stock levels

There is hardly a topic to generate more heated debate among anglers. It is easy to quote the tonne and a half of coarse fish landed in Inniscarra during the two days of the World Feeder Fishing championships. However Inniscarra is a special case, in that anglers pay a permit to fish and this is available to fund extra enforcement patrols. Not all our fisheries are as well resourced. There is a problem of perception with regard to low stocks, but there's also a very real problem of fisheries damaged by poachers, infections and invasive species.

- **Poaching**

We have a problem with dedicated bands of competent poachers raiding our fisheries often with impunity. Poaching has long been a problem in all branches of angling. Coarse fish were thought to be capable of looking after themselves. However fisheries subject to heavy predation by poaching gangs are slow to recover and will need assistance

Urgent action is needed and we believe the most cost effective approach is a network of Freshwater Nature Reserves. These reserves, would be free of angling pressure, by byelaw, and policed by fishery officers. Damaged fisheries could benefit with stockings from them.

This system has been piloted for 4 years in the South East where stocks of Rudd and Tench have been made available to fisheries in Waterford and Wexford

Currently IFI has no agreed approach to fish movement and this has given rise to difficulties. A policy in this area is necessary if the Network of Reserves is to offer a real solution



- **Game fishery management**

Long regarded as vermin by game anglers, coarse fish and predators are slaughtered in the name of fishery management. This activity continues despite the legal protection afforded these fish. A policy on fish movement would provide a licensing mechanism to harvest this important angling resource and re-home the fish in reserves of active fisheries.

- **Cormorants**

All freshwater fish are subject to cormorant predation. The current protection for this species is likely to continue despite latest EU survey showing massive increases in population across the continent. The current licensing system for cormorant control, through scaring, is inadequate for fishery protection. Liaison between state agencies, including IFI, is needed to put fishery interests on par with bird protection.

- **Legal harvesting**

The current legal position is that each individual can take 4 coarse fish per day. This byelaw sends a very poor message to coarse anglers at home and abroad. Legalising fish kills at any level is anathema to our community and enforcing the 4 fish rule has proven extremely difficult in practice

NCCFI is opposed to any harvesting of coarse and predator fish. The four fish rule is a very serious impediment to developing coarse angling tourism and is an offence to the fundamental principle of conservation underpinning our sport.



This bye law enrages many of our members, and I know of no angler and few fishery officers who believe it is remotely enforceable.

A bye law offering full protection to our coarse and predator fish stocks would be transforming and would show respect for the most cherished tenet of our sport. As such it would enhance Ireland's image as a coarse angling destination. It would cost nothing!

An education and signage programme will cost however, and is a necessary part of effective enforcement.

In summary this is a cheap, effective and fast fix offering real benefits and very positive PR.

- **Enforcement issues**

Given manpower shortages a Reserve Fishery Officer force seems a necessity. These RFO's, suited, booted and trained by IFI would act as a disciplined force under the direction of IFI personnel.

Clubs currently working with private water keepers are anxious to continue with a similar system. This can be facilitated by IFI through a training programme for water keepers

The indiscriminate use of keepnets support the work of poachers and this issue must be addressed. On the other hand, weighing and photographing the days catch is a much loved tradition among recreational coarse anglers.

One possible solution is to explicitly empower fishery officers and private water keepers to empty keepnets where they believe fish welfare to be an issue. A licensing system through local clubs for the use of keepnets is also a possibility.



## Fishery Development

- **Open Access**

Signs have started to appear at fisheries demanding anglers contact a phone number and identify themselves. Sometimes defended under the guise of biosecurity or fishery protection, this practice is not legal. We would ask that IFI as a matter of remove such signs as they constitute an illegal interference with anglers accessing their sport

- **Parking and Gateways**

Coarse anglers typically have trolley loads of tackle to transport to their fishing peg. Decent parking reasonably close to the bank together with gateways of a type suitable for wheelchair access offer serious comfort to coarse fishermen. They have the added social dividend of facilitating anglers with disabilities and are family friendly.

- **Anti Social Behaviour**

Number one complaint of anglers on the ground. Litter, burnt out fires and drinking parties on our fisheries exercise the mind of our fishermen more than any other single issue. Many of these anglers are visitors and are made to feel unwelcome by boisterous and abusive behaviour.

We know that IFI staff can only deal with this behaviour in partnership with anti litter staff and the Gardaí, however the issue can be prioritised by IFI and an increased focus on implementing effective protocols to deal with the problem would certainly help



## Funding

- **IFI**

We take this opportunity to again acknowledge the support given to NCFFI. Our programme of activities would not be possible without IFI sponsorship, both financial and logistical. Despite this there is a sense in the coarse angling community that we are the poor relations of game angling when it comes to enforcement and fishery development. There is strong historical evidence to support this sense of being undervalued.

We hope to see a coarse angling policy agreed in 2015 which will help to address this issue and offer a reasonable share of enforcement and development resources to our branch of the sport.

- **Angler Contributions**

Earlier we referenced the investment we make in promoting and running our festival programme. Coaching and youth programmes are funded by clubs locally and individual anglers have contributed time, energy and funds to help run national and international events. Any new coarse angling policy would need to explicitly acknowledge this contribution by clubs and individual members of NCFFI

- **Coarse Angling Development and Conservation Stamp**

Despite the above mentioned investment our sport is heavily under resourced. To address this we reiterate our policy that a Coarse Angling Development and Conservation Stamp be introduced as a legal requirement to participate in coarse angling sport in Ireland.

A detailed statement of how we envisage this fund being managed is attached.

