

## **THE FUTURE OF CANAL ANGLING?**

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**Have a read and then have your say**

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Milton Keynes AA is trying to help the Canal & Rivers Trust (formerly BW)  
by making the latter's draft

### **'Be inspired – Go Fishing'**

national angling strategy available to as many anglers as possible  
and collating any responses back to the Trust.

**If you wish to make comments, suggest alterations or ways  
improvements can be brought about, please email to**

**[info@mkaa.co.uk](mailto:info@mkaa.co.uk)**

**and make the subject line **Canal Report****

Thank you

Please note: many other angling organisations may find it appropriate  
to carry out consultation independently of what we are doing.

People are free to register their views through as many  
such consultations as they wish.

Thank you

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on behalf of MCAA

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## Be Inspired - Go Fishing

Our strategy for getting people fishing on our waters

Logo - Canal & River Trust

## **1. What we do now**

Millions of people make use of the canal waterways. Angling is one of a range of leisure activities that the canals support. It is an activity that has existed on the canal network since Victorian times and is part of the overall heritage of the waterways. We are the largest single owners of coarse fishing rights in England & Wales, controlling fishing rights on more than 1500 miles of canal and over 40 feeder reservoirs. We have a statutory duty<sup>1</sup> to provide boating and fishing on our cruising waterways.

Fishing rights on the canal network are leased (technically licensed) to approximately 350 angling clubs and associations. The day to day management of the angling activity is undertaken by the controlling angling clubs. They undertake activities such as sale of day memberships, enforcement of the club and national fishery rules, litter collections and act as the eyes and ears of the water reporting water loss, illegal fishing activity, fish theft, vandalism and pollutions.

Participation levels in angling on the canal network have declined significantly in the past twenty years. This is reflected in the number of clubs renting section of waterway which peaked at 490 back in the early 1990's. Before the early 1990's match and team fishing on the canals were particularly popular but after this time, interest started to slowly decline. This is at least partly due to changing fashions in angling; rivers and canals were once fished by large fishery associations, often industry sponsored e.g. steel and coal, which travelled some distance to fish these waters because their local waters were not clean enough to support fish. With the demise of the big industries and cleanup of our rivers, these large associations no longer exist and people now have the opportunity to fish more locally. The increasing rise in popularity of lake fishing, particularly for carp, has contributed to this decline in canal and river fishing. The reasons for popularity in lake fishing is due to a combination of factors but can be summarised as – safety for angler, equipment and vehicle; good access and parking close to fishing peg; no concerns over impacts of other water users; availability of a range of other on site facilities e.g. tackle shop, café, toilets.

## **2. So why do we need an angling strategy?**

The traditional approach to angling on the network has been to let the fishing rights to a (slowly declining) number of angling clubs. Our relationship with them is based around paying for a product or service. We want to build on this to develop the relationship into one that is more caring and compassionate about the canal network, its values and history and contribution to society and introduce a new band of people to the canal who will cherish it and become the guardians of it in the future.

Around 50% of the population of England & Wales live within a 5 mile travelling distance of a canal and many canals run through urban areas. Therefore the potential pool of people who 'live on the doorstep' and have an interest in angling is huge. Our aim is to get more of these people fishing. In addition we want to highlight and extend use of our waterways to individuals and

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<sup>1</sup> Transport Act 1968

groups to use angling to drive the personal and community benefits that we now know angling can provide.<sup>2</sup> Angling can be the catalyst for empowering local people to become active citizens and it can bring people together, changing perceptions and encouraging care of their local environment. Anglers can become an army of local volunteers to help improve their patch and look after it in the future.

We recognise the contribution that anglers and clubs already make to the network, but we believe that there is potential to do more if we can share our values, develop the relationship and work together for the long term.

### 3. What we are going to do in the future

We have set out our strategic objectives and priorities in our document 'Shaping our future – Strategic priorities'. We also have a set of charitable objectives which include a range of actions for public benefit:

- To protect and conserve sites, objects and buildings;
- The conservation, protection and improvement of the natural environment and landscape;
- To promote and facilitate restoration and improvement of Inland waterways;
- To promote and facilitate learning and education;
- To promote sustainable development...by the improvement of the conditions of life in socially and economically disadvantaged communities.

Angling and anglers can contribute to the achievement of these in a number of ways.

- Anglers have been and continue to be at the forefront of looking after the environment; reporting pollution, pushing for improvements, controlling and managing angling activity to ensure the resource is managed for the future.
- Angling is a first introduction to the natural environment and research has recorded that exposure to the environment at an early age provides long lasting benefits into later life.<sup>3</sup>
- Angling already has many links to the school curriculum and could do more
- Angling has been shown to improve people's lives – improve educational attainment, improve physical and mental health, reduce crime and antisocial behaviour, improve personal esteem and effectiveness

Given the decline in angling on the network, we need to review and refresh the whole angling experience. We recognise the contributions already being made but we want to move on to improve that experience in the future and bring in the benefits angling can provide.

The new national angling strategy, **Fishing for life** produced by the Angling Trust and the Environment Agency lists four specific objectives for angling to achieve:

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<sup>2</sup> Fishing for Answers – Final report of the Social and Community Benefits of Angling Project: Substance, 2012

<sup>3</sup>Stephen Moss,, 2012, Natural Childhood, National Trust

The four strategic objectives are:

**1. We want people to take up and continue fishing so it becomes a habit for life – getting the fishing habit.**

**2. We want angling to be recognised for its role in improving the nation’s health and well being, increasing educational attainment and reducing crime and anti social behaviour – transforming and changing lives.**

**3. We want to improve people’s lives by using angling as a catalyst for bringing people and society together – creating community waters.**

**4. We want people to recognise that fish and fishing are at the heart of a better environment – hands up for the environment.**

We will adopt these four objectives for our own strategy as they correlate strongly with our own strategic priorities and our charitable objectives.

### **1. Getting the fishing habit.**

We want to increase the number of people visiting and using our waterways. We can increase the use of the waterways by involving more young people in angling from an early age; we know that many current anglers started fishing at an early age, between 4 and 16 years old<sup>4</sup>, usually introduced by a family member. We need to encourage our customer clubs to do more to introduce more young people to angling and we will open discussions with them about how this can happen. One idea may be to encourage angling clubs to join the ClubMark scheme, a cross-sport accreditation for sports clubs with junior sections in recognition of being a quality club.

**Clubmark for Angling** is the Angling Trust's accreditation scheme for clubs. It is a national recognition of clubs that demonstrate they are working towards minimum operating standards. Achievement of this status will mean that the club will be more able to gain access to additional funding opportunities.

To attract new people into angling and then into using our waterways we will trial schemes such as Streetfishing<sup>5</sup> in a number of locations. Our urban canals in Manchester, Birmingham, Sheffield, Liverpool, London and Leeds are potentially well suited to this.

We will work with County Angling Action Groups to find pathways to engage with young people e.g. the Scouts. We will seek more opportunities for the network to be available for angling events and matches such as the Schools National Championship and Cadets, Juniors & Intermediates National Championship.

We will encourage existing angling clubs to run more matches for those other clubs who fish the canal network and consider a series of local canal championships or set up a national competition based on regional waterway areas encompassing such activity as a Fishing Triathlon

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<sup>4</sup> National Angling Survey, 2012

<sup>5</sup> Streetfishing is a phenomenon grown up in Europe which attracts young people into angling but also allows busy anglers to fit in fishing sessions between and after work. It attracts non-angling media and has a growing brand of associated gear and clothing.

– coarse, sea and trout fishing with regional winners taking part in a national final – or a fishing Duathlon – canal and reservoir fishing competitions.

We will work with the Angling Trust to extend their Building Bridges campaign to raise awareness and knowledge of fishing rules in England & Wales compared to other European countries. The Angling Trust have produced a series of information sheets which we can distribute further through our club networks and provide further opportunities for improved communication e.g. by running specific fishing matches to which these groups of anglers would be attracted. For example, zander fishing matches in canals known to have high stock levels of this species and which are difficult to let to angling clubs.

We will continue to attract and increase the involvement in different forms of angling e.g. kayak angling. This is an innovative and growing sport which allows the angler to get close to nature, the fish and places others may not be able to access.

We know that cost and having nowhere to fish locally are barriers to people starting and continuing in angling<sup>6</sup>. We will take opportunities created by our maintenance programmes to provide and maintain facilities and services which will be attractive to anglers and other waterway users including those that are less able. We need our anglers to be able to access them easily from the main access points.

We need to increase the profile of angling with the public and within our own internal teams. Throughout the industry, there is a lack of readily available information on starting angling and places to go. We will provide information on angling in areas where the public congregate e.g. our museums and we will work with partners to provide opportunities for the public to try angling at events such as Open days e.g. Ellesmere Port Boat Museum Open day, local and national waterway festivals. We will improve our website so that there is much more information available, including for those parts of the network not in our ownership. We will work with others to identify the options for the establishment of a central resource which provides details of where to go fishing for new and experienced anglers alike. We can celebrate the value and benefits of angling and the wider network and activities through the establishment of an angling festival.

## **2. Transforming and changing lives.**

A research report by Substance<sup>7</sup> identifies twelve reasons why angling is important by adding value to improve a wide range of health and well being outcomes.

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<sup>6</sup> National Angling Survey and National Organisation Survey

<sup>7</sup> Making the Most of Community Waters - Localism, Health and Angling

The added benefits of angling:

- A socially inclusive activity.
- Reduce social isolation through community engagement
- Strengthen family relationships through family-orientated activities
- Reduce anti-social behaviour in neglected spaces.
- Improve physical health
- Improve mental health
- Develop young people's resilience and coping strategies
- Encourage youth access to the benefits of green spaces.
- A resource for targeted intervention work.
- A resource for education and training.
- Encourage 'active ageing'.
- Facilitate inter-generational engagement

We can derive these benefits and deliver our strategic priorities and our charitable objectives by working with key organisations that specialise in the area of youth engagement. Get Hooked on Fishing (GHOF) is one which provides an umbrella structure for the twenty or so Get Hooked on Fishing schemes that now run in England, Scotland and Wales and these correlate well to the canal network. GHOF works with partners such as the Environment Agency, the Angling Trust, Positive Futures, charitable trusts, central and local government to promote the value of angling for young people who are troubled or who have special needs. Their success is well recorded in Fishing for Answers.<sup>8</sup> We need to engage with GHOF to develop locations on our network where their success can be replicated.

We will also look to establish further partnerships with other service providers and who have a track record of working with young people e.g. Watford Angling Coaches

### **3. Creating community waters.**

The research report by Substance<sup>9</sup> identifies the opportunities for angling as a result of new Government policy relating to the localism agenda and new priorities in public health. Localism provides opportunities to:

- Empower communities
- Improve and increase the roles of social enterprises, cooperatives and civil society organisations (charities, community organisations, cooperatives and social enterprises)
- Encourage civil society organisations to increase citizen involvement, especially volunteering
- Create greater social, environmental and economic value in localities
- Increase levels of giving and mutual support in our society

The report continues: The use of local waters as a tool for facilitating social inclusion and promoting wellbeing is however, less well developed. As a result many waters are under-utilised resources that could be put to much greater use as part of strategies to improve public health and wellbeing, facilitate social inclusion and improve a range of outcomes for young people.

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<sup>8</sup> Fishing for Answers: Final Report of the Social and Community Benefits of Angling Project **Section 6: Angling and Young People**

<sup>9</sup> Making the Most of Community Waters - Localism, Health and Angling

We can take the opportunities presented by this new Government agenda and our own aspirations to increase the length of canal let or managed by local community groups e.g. under our adopt a canal proposal. We will need to develop our ideas and approach, identify suitable locations for a number of pilots and engage with partners with special skills and knowledge in this area. As mentioned above GHOF has extensive experience of working with young people and it has recently established a Social Enterprise Angling Centre in Ealing, London and has plans to roll out this concept round the country. We will discuss with GHOF and other providers about the opportunities we can take forward.

We will work with fisheries interests to develop local waterway access and ownership schemes for local areas e.g. Waterways Wanderers Birmingham, Manchester, London or in any urban area where some of the fishing rights are not let. This will include exploring opportunities with specialist angling society and clubs e.g. Lure Angling Society and the Pike Anglers Club of Great Britain.

#### **4. Hands up for the environment**

Fish are at the heart of fishing and the environment. Fish are a key indicator of water quality in a piece of European legislation called the Water Framework Directive. We will work to achieve the targets set out in the directive to achieve good ecological potential for our waterways. We will need to address issues around fish passage for eel, elver, and other migratory fish and take opportunities to improve habitat and provide wetlands where we can.

However, it is not necessarily under the water where some of the issues arise that affect our canals occur as virtually all the network has water quality of sufficient standard to support Cyprinid coarse fisheries. From time to time there will be issues around pollution and we will take steps to minimize any impact and take remedial action as soon as is practical in partnership with the Environment Agency and other partners. We will continue to protect fisheries resources by carrying out fish rescues and during our routine engineering activities.

The main issues impacting locally on angling relate to invasive species and improved understanding of the waterway environment. There are volunteer opportunities in collecting and undertaking surveys. For example, clubs may be able to carry out Invasive plant distribution surveys, control & management on the waters that they lease potentially covering x% of the waterway over time. In some instances clubs may in future take part in organised non native species control activities e.g. signal crayfish trapping at locations on the Kennet & Avon, Oxford, and Grand Union Canal

Zander are a non native species that are present in around 250 miles of canal, dominating fish stocks and spreading further from their existing distribution. The result is a loss of amenity, income and participation opportunities. We need to manage the fishery e.g. take opportunities for a predator club to run the fishery, or find novel ways of limiting their distribution and controlling their numbers.

Angling can take a lead and be seen at the forefront of delivering environmental improvements on these key issues affecting canal fishing. We will provide support in gaining the necessary



approvals, the equipment to carry out the tasks. We will look for funding from new sources e.g. Awards for All to help deliver this work.

### **Heritage and education**

Good fishing relies on having healthy fish populations; fish stocks in the network are comprised of cyprinids that are well suitable to the water quality. They provide the food for otters, kingfishers, cormorants, herons and other predators including other fish such as pike and zander. But this activity goes generally unnoticed. We need to change the view that out of sight is out of mind and link what is underwater to the local natural environment and something that we need to look after.

We will use the feature of 'what is living under the water' to promote environmental education. We will provide fish tanks in our museums to show what the fish look like, make links to the natural food chain and wider environmental conditions. These natural resources have been exploited over many years to provide food and more recently recreation. From these locations, we will signpost fishing opportunities to local angling clubs and wider environmental issues to local river and wildlife trusts.

The fish stocks on the River Severn demonstrate how special some of the fish stocks are locally to some of our assets. The River Severn is home to protected and rare shad, elvers and salmon and the river has a long tradition of exploiting some of these stocks in a special way. We can make links to these, to local people and traditions. In doing so we can involve new people in learning about and taking part in canal activities.

### **Delivery**

#### ***Partnership***

Much of this work can be delivered by our angling clubs if we can achieve buy in and ownership to what we want to do. This will take time and a new and different approach. We want our clubs to be partners in how we take forward this strategy and them to be in for the long term. We will provide support, resources where we can and leadership through our Waterways teams and xx Waterway Partnership groups.

In areas where we and our clubs don't have the expertise, we will work in partnership. We can provide the waterway network to others who have the skills and expertise to help us deliver our goals. We may need to pump prime some projects to allow them to be established so will need to set aside appropriate resource and manpower to enable this to happen.

We recognise that partnerships and new ways of working will take time to become embedded and be the norm. We will work hard to take our new messages to our own staff and our partners through our existing structure and networks.

## **Resources**

We are proposing to operate in new areas of work. We will provide some new resource by reinvesting budget from the income we derive from our fishing leases. (Licenses) We will look at sources of funding identified in the national angling strategy<sup>10</sup>, Fishing for Life, as well as sources not previously tested e.g. the Sport England Small Grants Programme uses Lottery funding to make awards of between £300 and £10,000 to not-for-profit organisations to help more young people (aged 14+) and adults take and keep a sporting habit for life.

We know that by working in partnership we can bring in new sources of funding that have not previously been available. We recognise we will not be able to achieve everything all at once but that a phased approach will be necessary over a number of years.

## **Communication**

We know we need to work hard and with others to make the convincing arguments for the benefits of angling as a whole. We need to tell what is good and enjoyable about angling, the work anglers do and the benefits angling provides. We will generate positive news stories of events, people, fishing news to demonstrate successes and benefits, and the fun people have using the canals. Only then will the benefits for young people and local communities really shine through.

But what we also want to achieve through this strategy is a new feel for how people, including anglers, look and use the canals. We want them to care for them, nurture them and be a bit possessive about them. As part of this we want to be able to talk directly with our individual angling customers. We do not have that at the moment in the way that the Environment Agency does with the requirement for a rod licence. We will explore ways that we may be able to implement this.

## **Targets**

- A) Develop from above
- B) Identify data needs/requirements

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<sup>10</sup> Fishing for life, page 26